

# BADGES AND INSIGNIA OF THE ELITE FORCES



## LERROY THOMPSON

**BADGES AND INSIGNIA OF THE**  
**ELITE FORCES**





**BADGES AND INSIGNIA OF THE**  
**ELITE FORCES**

**LEROY THOMPSON**

◀ During an award ceremony both Airborne Command and XVIII Airborne Corps shoulder sleeve insignia are in wear.





**Arms and Armour**

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Many people have given me assistance in preparing this book, but a few should be singled out for special thanks. I should first like to thank Harry Pugh, to whom most of us who are interested in elite unit insignia owe a salute for acting as the pathfinder in the subject. Others include Ken and Pam Lewis, Hal Feldman, Lou DiPonziano, Joe Gervasi, Adrian Bohlen,

Rene Smeets, Pete McDermott, and all the other members of Chute and Dagger.

▼ In 1961 this member of the Special Forces now wears the Special Forces arrowhead shoulder sleeve

insignia but still wears the parachute badge and oval as a beret badge. (US Army)





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# INTRODUCTION

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In defining the term 'élite military units' one always finds certain confusion. In Great Britain, for example, many would class any of the Guards Regiments as élite, while in France, the Meharistes who galloped across the Sahara on their camels are considered élite. For purposes of this book, however, I have considered as élite those units that are parachute-qualified, or that have been trained as Commandos, Rangers or long-range patrollers. In some cases I have also included anti-terrorist units which, when military, definitely fall within these parameters and when police probably do.

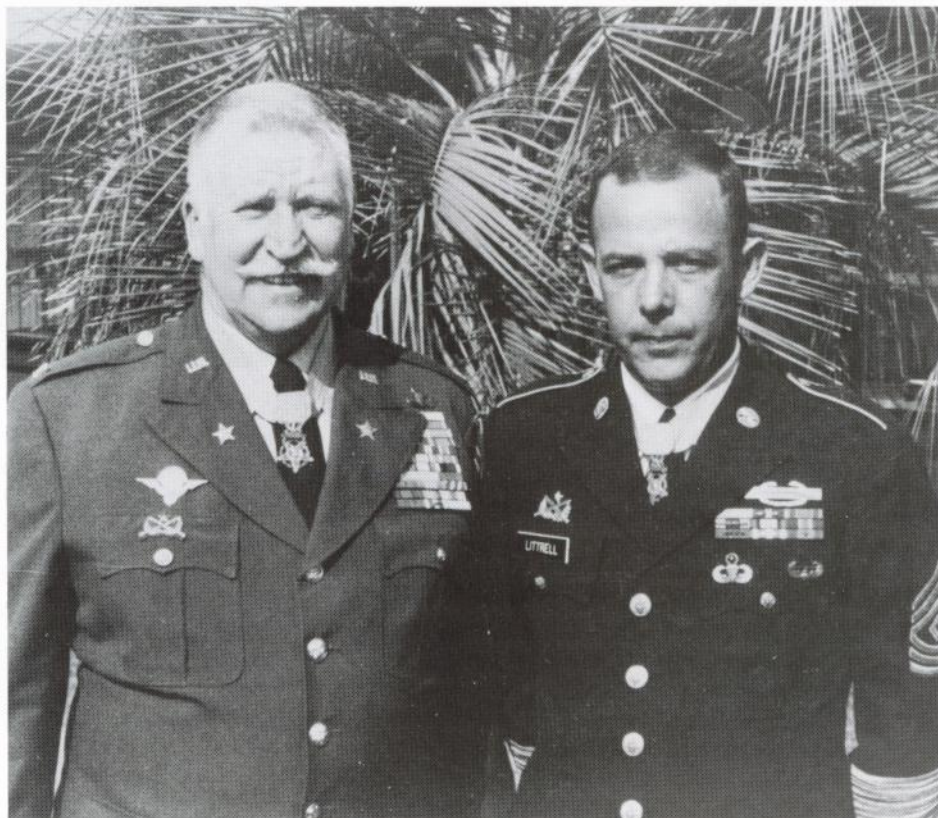
Although as originally conceived this work would have covered such élite units from their genesis during the Second World War until the present, the fact that Second World War insignia have already been covered in some detail elsewhere and the necessity to limit space have caused me to start in the post-war period and end at about the Falklands War. Due to the

availability of the excellent works on parachute badges by Bragg and Turner, I have also not included parachute badges (or brevets) but have instead concentrated on beret badges or flashes, shoulder sleeve insignia, pocket patches, collar insignia, distinctive insignia, and other types of qualification badges.

It would be naïve on my part to claim completeness for this work since many insignia worn by élite units are produced in extremely limited numbers and in great variety. It probably would have been possible, in fact, to write an entire book on US insignia alone, and certainly it would be possible to do just that for French insignia. But having had to be selective, I have sought to choose those most likely to be encountered or those of particular interest.

Leroy Thompson  
St. Louis, Missouri

► Two US Congressional Medal of Honor winners – Colonel Lewis Millett and FSG Garry Littrell – wearing both US parachute brevets and Vietnamese Ranger qualification badges; note that Littrell also wears Air Assault brevet and Millett wears a French para brevet. (Society of Vietnamese Ranger)



# AFRICA

## RHODESIA

Rhodesia's initial parachute-qualified unit was the squadron which volunteered for service with the British SAS in Malaya. Later designated C Squadron, this unit was disbanded upon its return to Rhodesia, but was reformed in 1962 and continued to serve on special operations within Rhodesia and across her borders until that country ceased to exist. To some extent an offshoot of the SAS, the Tracker Combat Unit and other formations, were the Selous Scouts, a highly trained unit specializing in pseudo counter-insurgency operations as well as cross-border raids. The Rhodesian

### PLATE 1: RHODESIA

- 1 SAS cap badge
- 2 SAS collar insignia
- 3 Selous Scouts LTC shoulder slide
- 4 Selous Scouts shoulder slide (major's rank)
- 5 Selous Scouts shoulder slide (captain)
- 6 Selous Scouts shoulder slide (lieutenant)
- 7 Light Infantry beret badge
- 8 Selous Scouts beret badge
- 9 Selous Scouts stable belt

► Selous Scouts captain, clean shaven which was not the norm in the Scouts, shows the beret badge on

the chocolate-brown beret and the shoulder slides with rank and unit ID. (David Scott-Donelan)

Light Infantry should also be mentioned since as counter-insurgency progressed this unit received parachute training as well. Many of its 'Fire Forces' were parachuted in as blocking forces to cut off guerrillas fleeing the country. Often jumping from extremely low altitude, members of the RLI more than once made as many as three combat jumps in one day thus surpassing even the French paras in Indo-China in the number of combat jumps.

Rhodesian SAS troops wore the same sand-coloured beret as the British SAS; Selous Scouts wore a brown beret, and the RLI a green beret.



## SOUTH AFRICA

The first South African parachute unit was the 2nd Mobile Watch, which was converted to the 1st Parachute Battalion in April 1961. This unit saw action

against insurgents in South West Africa in 1966. Initially, trained reservists served with 1st Parachute Battalion as well, but in 1971, 2nd Parachute Battalion was formed as a Citizen Force (Reserve) unit. Members of 2nd Parachute Battalion saw action during Opera-

### PLATE 1 CONTINUED: SOUTH AFRICA

- 1 Original cloth 1st Parachute Battalion shoulder insignia
- 2 Variant of No. 1
- 3 Early 1st Parachute Battalion insignia
- 4 1st Parachute Battalion shoulder arc

- 5 Afrikaans version of No. 4
- 6 Enamelled metal 1st Parachute Battalion shoulder crest
- 7 Cloth version of No. 6
- 8 1st Parachute Battalion pocket crest
- 9 1st Parachute Battalion arm flash on hanger
- 10 44th Parachute Brigade arm flash



PLATE 1



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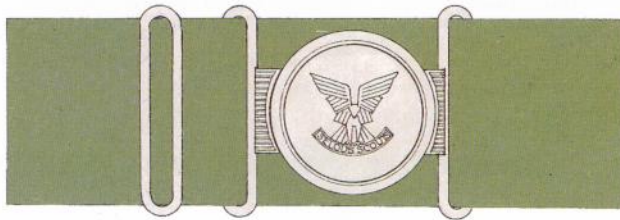
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tion 'Savanna' in the Angolan Civil War. In 1977 3rd Parachute Battalion was established as another reserve formation. Companies from all three battalions saw extensive action in South West Africa on COIN ops.

In April 1978, 44 Parachute Brigade was formed; 320 members of the airborne forces taking part in a jump on a SWAPO base deep in Angola only about a month later in Operation 'Reindeer'.

Currently, parachutists must qualify by undergoing four weeks of airborne training which includes eleven jumps. To become free-fall-qualified requires a 3-weeks' free-fall course including about fifty free-fall jumps. Fifty jumps are also required to be awarded the advanced parachutist rank. Advanced parachutists may undergo instructor training.

There are also South African Police task force members who are parachute-qualified. Of particular interest were the Rail and Harbour Police Task Force which had a counter-terrorist role. Their qualification course included SWAT, explosives and weapons training, and fifteen jumps including five free-fall.

Special forces duties within the South African armed forces are handled by the Reconnaissance Commandos,

each of which had specialized duties. Fourth Reconnaissance Commando, for example, has the amphibious/combat swimmer mission while 5th Recce Commando, formed initially from former Rhodesian Selous Scouts, has the pseudo operations mission.

Not strictly part of the South African elite forces but related are those airborne/special forces of the Black homelands within South Africa. Bophuthatswana has a special forces unit located at Lehurutshe Military Base near the Botswana border. Of company strength, this unit has a counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism mission. In addition to their parachute wings, airborne-qualified members of the Special Forces company wear burgundy-coloured berets. Ciskei initially trained a small special forces unit of their police, but in 1982 this unit was expanded to 'squadron' strength. Transkei has a Special Forces Regiment which was initially trained by Ron Reid Daly, former commander of the Selous Scouts. Based at Port St. Johns, the Transkei Special Forces wear a maroon beret. At the time of writing, Transkei is also considering converting their 1st Infantry Battalion to an airborne battalion.

## **PLATE 2: SOUTH AFRICA AND SOUTH AFRICAN HOMELANDS**

**11** 2nd Parachute Battalion

**12** 3rd Parachute Battalion

**13** 4th Parachute Battalion

**14** 18th Light Artillery Regiment

**15** 44th AA Regiment

**16** 44th Maintenance Unit

**17** 44th Field Workshop

**18** 44th Field Engineers

**19** 44th Signal Unit

**20** Subdued cloth arm flash for 2nd Parachute Battalion; such subdued flashes have also been used for the 3rd and 4th Parachute Battalions and the 18th Light Artillery Regiment

**21** Ciskei Special Forces arm flash

Note Nos. 22-25 are fake items which were never adopted and are included for information

**22** Proposed 2nd Reconnaissance Commando insignia in metal

**23** Proposed 2nd Reconnaissance Commando insignia in cloth

**24** Variant of No 22 in metal

**25** Proposed 1st Reconnaissance Commando insignia in cloth

**26** HQ Special Forces arm flash

**27** 1st Reconnaissance Commando arm flash

**28** 2nd Reconnaissance Commando arm flash

**29** 4th Reconnaissance Commando arm flash

**30** 5th Reconnaissance Commando arm flash; the presence of the Selous Scouts parachute wings on the badge

**31** Early 5th Reconnaissance track suit patch

**32** Ciskei special forces beret badge

**33** Ciskei special forces collar insignia

**34** Transkei special forces beret badge

**35** Transkei special forces/airborne arm flash

PLATE 2



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## PLATE 3: CONGO

The later history of Parachute/Commando forces in the former Belgian Congo are related below under Zaire. Of particular interest from the time when it was the Congo are the various 'Commando' units formed of white mercenaries or of blacks trained by white mercenaries during the 1960s.

1 Commando beret badge

2 Commando beret badge, worn by Mike Hoare's 5

Commando among others

3 Commando beret badge

4-10 Various shoulder/pocket insignia worn by Commando units in the Congo; note the presence of the sword and star in most.

▼ Congolese 'Airborne Commandos' show a

diversity of uniform and equipment.



## PLATE 3 CONTINUED: ZAIRE

While Zaire was still the Congo, white mercenaries trained a Commando Battalion which acted as a presidential guard unit. Later US Special Forces personnel trained parachute personnel as did the Israelis. By 1967, members of the parachute battalions were used against white mercenaries. By the mid-1970s there were at least a half-dozen parachute battalions as well as Commando battalions. In April 1977 and May 1978, members of Zaire's Parachute

Regiment made combat jumps against Katangan rebels. Generally, Zaire's paras are rated among the best in black Africa.

1 Parachutist Commando beret badge

2 Commando beret badge

3 Commando instructor brevet

4 Commando A Brevet

5 Commando B Brevet

6 Guerrilla Warfare brevet

7 Guerrilla Warfare instructor



PLATE 3



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# THE AMERICAS

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## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

All four branches of the US armed forces contain units which can be termed 'elite'. Within the Army are the Airborne, Air Assault, Rangers, and Special Forces including the Delta anti-terrorist unit; within the Navy are the SEAL (Sea, Air, Land) Teams; within the

Marine Corps the Recons and the ANGLICOs, and within the Air Force the PJs (Pararescuemen), the CCTs (Combat Control Teams), and the men of the Combat Weather units. In many cases training for these various units overlaps, with a substantial amount of cross-training between the units taking place. Virtually all share basic airborne qualification

## PLATE 4: US BERET FLASHES

**1** US Army John F. Kennedy Center for Military Assistance

**2** Special Forces School: Originally these were made by the instructors or their wives who took white felt and cut it to shape; for a period during the 1960s a version in naugahide was also worn; today, however, a machine-made version is worn

**3** 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne)

**4** 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) incorporating the black 'mourning band' added after the death of President Kennedy, the patron of the Special Forces. This flash may be found with both 1/8in and 1/16in wide mourning bands

**5** 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne)

**6** 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne): the original 5th Group flash and reinstated for use by the Group a few years ago

**7** 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne): the flash adopted after the deployment of the 5th to Vietnam and incorporating the colours of that country's flag; this version continued to be worn by the 5th throughout the 1970s and on into the 1980s

**8** 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne): flash locally made in Vietnam and incorporating the skull and crossbones of the 'Bright Light Teams'

**9** 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne): flash locally made in Vietnam and incorporating officers' or warrant officers' rank insignia, most often found with captain's or 1st lieutenant's rank

**10** 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne): flash locally made in Vietnam and incorporating the Special Forces DI, which was worn on the beret flash by enlisted personnel

**11** 6th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

**12** 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

**13** 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

**14** 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

**15** 11th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

**16** 12th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

**17** Reserve Components Special Forces: this flash was originally worn by all US Army Reserve and National Guard Special Forces Groups

**18** 19th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

**19** 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne): original flash worn by this National Guard Special Forces Group

**20** 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne): current version of this group's flash

**21** Special Forces Detachment Europe: note that this flash incorporates the colours of the Federal Republic of Germany's flag

**22** 46th Special Forces Company (Airborne): this flash for the Special Forces personnel in Thailand during the Vietnam War period incorporates the colours of the Thai flag

**23** Special Forces Detachment Korea: this flash, still in wear by Special Forces personnel assigned to Korea, incorporates the colours of the ROK flag

**24** US Army John F. Kennedy-Walter Reed Army Institute of Research Field Epidemiological Survey Team (Airborne). Popularly known as the FEST flash, this very rare flash was worn by Special Forces medical personnel sent to South-east Asia to survey diseases likely to be encountered by US military personnel serving there

**25** USARVITG-FANK: this flash was worn by those Special Forces personnel involved in training Cambodian troops

**26** 22nd Special Warfare Aviation Company

**27** Ranger flash worn in Vietnam

**28** Variation of the Ranger flash in Vietnam

**29** Another variation of the Ranger flash in Vietnam

**30** LRRP (Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol) flash worn in Vietnam by members of the 1/4 or 3/4 Cavalry



PLATE 4



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achieved through attending the 3-weeks' basic parachute course at Fort Benning, Georgia. The Ranger course lasts 58 days and by pushing the trainees through twenty or more hours of training per day, compacts about six months' training into one-third that time. The Special Forces Q-Course (Qualification Course) lasts seventeen weeks (more for combat medics) above basic airborne qualification. The Air Assault course lasts two weeks but it is an intensive two weeks. BUD/S (Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL) training lasts six months, while in the Marine Corps Basic Amphibious Recon School lasts seven weeks. Within the Air Forces, PJ training lasts up to eleven months in a course that includes parachute, scuba, survival, medical and various other types of training. CCT and Combat Weather are somewhat

similar though the specialized training in air traffic control and meteorology are substituted for that in combat medicine.

Traditionally, there have been three distinctions which help identify most members of US elite units – the beret, trousers bloused into jump boots, and special insignia, especially parachutist's wings. First to wear the beret were the Special Forces, still known to many as the 'Green Berets', in fact, based on their headgear. Special Forces has remained the only unit to wear the green beret. Airborne troops, CCTs, and PJs all currently wear the maroon beret, though the CCTs previously wore a dark-blue one. The Air Force Combat Security Police (a Ranger-trained elite light infantry unit of the Vietnam War) also wore blue berets as have the 101st Airborne (Air Assault), and the Combat

**31** Flash worn by some airborne elements of the 17th Armored Cavalry in Vietnam (probably the cavalry elements assigned to the 82nd or 101st Airborne Divisions or the 173rd Airborne Brigade)

**32** A variation of the 17th Cavalry flash

**33** Company D (Ranger) 151st Infantry (Indiana National Guard)

**34** Original Ranger flash of 1st Battalion (Ranger) 75th Infantry, which continued to be worn by Ranger depot instructors after the adoption of the second-pattern flash below

**35** Second Pattern Ranger flash worn by 1st and 2nd Battalions (Ranger) 75th Infantry until replaced after the formation of the 3rd Ranger Battalion

**36** Company F (Ranger) 425th Infantry (Michigan Army National Guard)

## **PLATE 5: U.S. BERET FLASHES CONTINUED**

**37** Flash of 28th Infantry Detachment (Pathfinder), 28th Aviation Battalion (Indiana National Guard); note that this flash was initially formed by cutting in half subdued and colour versions of the 28th Division's shoulder sleeve insignia and sewing one-half of each together

**38** Company C (Airborne), 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry, 172nd Infantry Brigade (Alaska)

**39** Company C (Airborne), 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry, 172nd Infantry Brigade (Alaska)

**40** Company C (Airborne), 1st Battalion, 60th Infantry, 172nd Infantry Brigade (Alaska)

**41** HHC, 71st Airborne Brigade (separate), (Texas Army National Guard); now obsolete

**42** 1st Battalion (Airborne), 143rd Infantry, 71st Airborne Brigade (separate) (Texas Army National Guard); now obsolete

**43** 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 143rd Infantry, 71st Airborne Brigade (separate) (Texas Army National Guard); now obsolete

**44** HQ, 82nd Airborne Division

**45** 1st Brigade (Airborne), 82nd Airborne Division

**46** 2nd Brigade (Airborne), 82nd Airborne Division

**47** 3rd Brigade (Airborne), 82nd Airborne Division

**48** 1st Battalion (Airborne), 325th Infantry

**49** 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 325th Infantry

**50** 3rd Battalion (Airborne), 325th Infantry

**51** Company E (Anti-Armor), 325th Infantry

**52** 1st Battalion (Airborne), 504th Infantry

**53** 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 504th Infantry

**54** Company E (Anti-Armor), 504th Infantry

**55** 1st Battalion (Airborne), 505th Infantry

**56** 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 505th Infantry

**57** 1st Battalion (Airborne), 508th Infantry

**58** 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 508th Infantry

**59** 82nd Airborne Division Artillery

**60** 3rd Battalion (Vulcan) (Airborne), 4th Air Defense Artillery

**61** 82nd Airborne Division DISCOM

**62** 407th S&S Battalion

**63** 307th Medical Battalion

**64** 307th Engineer Battalion

**65** 618th Engineer Company (L.E.M.)

**66** 82nd Signal Battalion; note this flash was made in error with the pentagon upside down (see 67)

**67** 82nd Signal Battalion

**68** 82nd Aviation Battalion

**69** 1st Squadron, 17th Cavalry

**70** 4th Battalion (Airborne) (Light), 68th Armor; note all flashes from nos 44 to 70 are for 82nd Airborne Division units, though some are now obsolete

**71** HQ, XVIII Airborne Corps

**72** XVIII Airborne Corps Artillery



PLATE 5



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Weather troops who wore a blue/grey beret. The Rangers wear a black beret, while the SEALs have at times worn both black and camouflage berets though neither was official.

'Official' is an operant word when discussing US elite insignia, too, as only a limited amount of the insignia associated with US elite forces was ever authorized. Many, but certainly not all, beret flashes usually worn behind a unit crest of DI (Distinctive Insignia) were authorized; most DIs were authorized; only the major

unit SSIs (Shoulder Sleeve Insignia) were normally authorized, and few pocket patches have ever been authorized. The Vietnam War especially saw a profusion of fascinating pocket patches made by local small tailor shops and worn on casual clothing, inside berets, or on the pockets of utility clothing. Because these locally made pocket patches are so fascinating and so rare they have now been widely faked, and one must be very careful in adding them to a collection as the prices now asked are frequently quite high.



◀ Member of the 82nd Airborne Division applies camouflage paint; note the subdued version of the 82nd shoulder sleeve insignia. (US Army)

## PLATE 6: U.S. BERET FLASHES CONTINUED

- 73 50th Signal Battalion (XVIII Airborne Corps)
- 74 20th Engineering Brigade (XVIII Airborne Corps)
- 75 20th Engineer Battalion, 101st Airborne Division
- 76 27th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne)
- 77 600th Quartermaster Company (AER)
- 78 612th Quartermaster Company (AD)
- 79 313th CWIE Battalion
- 80 ACE Board, Army Material Command
- 81 US Army Airborne Board
- 82 503rd MP Battalion, 16th MP Brigade
- 83 HQ, 101st Airborne Division
- 84 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division
- 85 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division
- 86 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division
- 87 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry
- 88 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry
- 89 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry
- 90 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry
- 91 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry

- 92 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry
- 93 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry
- 94 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry
- 95 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry
- 96 101st Airborne Division Artillery; note that the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and the 82nd Airborne Division Artillery wear this same flash
- 97 1st Battalion (Vulcan), 3rd ADA
- 98 101st Airborne DISCOM (Division Support Command)
- 99 101st MP Company
- 100 326th Engineer Battalion
- 101 501st Signal Battalion
- 102 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry
- 103 101st Aviation Group
- 104 US Army Forces Command (FORSCOM)
- 105 29th Transportation Battalion
- 106 86th Combat Support Hospital
- 107 5th Infantry Platoon (Pathfinder) (Airborne) (97th ARCOM)
- 108 Company E (Ranger), 65th Infantry (Puerto Rico Army National Guard); obsolete

PLATE 6



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## **PLATE 7: BERET FLASHES AND SPECIAL FORCES DISTINCTIVE INSIGNIA**

**109** Flash worn by advisers from the 1st SFG (Airborne) from 1961 to 1963; originally of quilted material

**110** Flash reportedly worn by Special Forces personnel working with the CIA in Laos in the early 1960s; made from camouflaged parachute silk

**111** Parachute oval for 1st Special Operations Command (Airborne); note that almost all of the beret flashes illustrated would have a matching parachute oval to be worn behind the parachute wings to designate unit assignment. The Special Forces Groups also at one time had what were known as 'striker bars', a bar bearing the same colours/pattern as the flash and worn on the beret by those personnel who might be assigned to a Group who were not fully Special Forces qualified

**112** Flash for 1st SOCOM (Airborne)

**113** Flash for Joint Special Operations Command

**114** Flash for the LRRP Platoon, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment in Vietnam; this flash exists in both locally hand-made and machine-made forms

**115** Flash for Company E (LRP), 50th Infantry (9th Infantry Division) in Vietnam; this flash exists with variations in both hand- and machine-made forms

**116** Flash for 74th Infantry Detachment (LRP), 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vietnam

**117** Flash for Company A (Airborne), 3rd Battalion, 5th Infantry (193rd Infantry Brigade)

**118** Flash worn by HQ personnel for the Puerto Rico National Guard and also reportedly by Company E (Ranger), 65th Infantry

**119** Flash for the US Army Parachute Team (The Golden Knights)

**120** Flash worn by USAF Combat Weather personnel

**121** Flash for the 1/143rd Infantry

**122** Flash for Company C (Pathfinder), 509th Infantry (1st Aviation Brigade)

**123** Flash for 525th Military Intelligence Brigade (CEWI) (Airborne) (XVIII Airborne Corps)

**124** Flash for 561st Maintenance Battalion

**1** Distinctive Insignia for the Special Warfare Center and Institute for Military Assistance

**2** DI for 1st Psychological Operations Battalion

**3** DI for 77th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

**4** DI for 1st Special Forces

**5** Beret badge worn by the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) before the adoption of a beret flash from 1955-62

**6** DI for 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

**7** DI worn by 1st Special Operations Command on right shoulder-strap

**8** DI worn by 1st SOCOM on left shoulder-strap and beret

**9** DI worn by staff of MACV RECONDO School in Vietnam



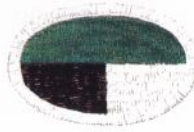
◀ Members of the 77th SFG (Airborne) during guerrilla warfare training. Note that one of the two soldiers is acting as a local indigenous man. The parachute wings and oval were worn as the beret badge, and the Airborne Command shoulder sleeve insignia is being worn. (US Army)



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## PLATE 8: US SPECIAL FORCES MACV/SOG INSIGNIA – VIETNAM

- 1 Locally made shoulder sleeve insignia for the 5th Special Forces Group; note that many of the MACV/SOG insignia illustrated can be found in both hand-sewn and machine-sewn versions and possibly in many variants because many of the insignia were re-made for new arrivals 'in country' or new recon team members
- 2 US Special Forces Vietnam pocket patch, normally encountered encased in plastic and with a pocket hanger; note that the crossed arrows and dagger with green beret motif is used
- 3 Another Special Forces pocket patch. Like virtually all the other pocket patches worn in Vietnam, this one was unofficial; many of the patches were worn inside the green beret, in fact, sewn to the lining
- 4 5th Special Forces blazer patch, roughly duplicating the 5th SFG (Airborne) beret flash in Vietnam, though without the white border
- 5 Pocket patch for the 5th SFG (Airborne) Command and Control element
- 6 Pocket patch worn by 5th SFG (Airborne) Liaison personnel; 'Lien Lac' translates as liaison
- 7 Shoulder tab worn by members of Detachment B-36
- 8 Shoulder tab worn by members of Detachment B-40; note that 'IV CTZ' stands for IV Corps Tactical Zone
- 9 Pocket patch for Detachment B-52 which controlled Project Delta
- 10 Patch for Detachment B-53
- 11 Another patch for B-53 Special Mission Advisory Group; note that this unit's duties included training and advising the Vietnamese Airborne forces, hence the presence of the ARVN airborne beret on the insignia
- 12 Patch for Detachment B-56, which worked with Project Sigma; 'Tham Bao' means Intelligence; note also the presence of the Greek letter 'Sigma'
- 13 Patch for Detachment B-57, which worked with Project Gamma; hence the Greek letter 'Gamma'
- 14 Patch for Detachment A-303 which controlled a Mobile Guerrilla force
- 15 Shoulder tab worn by members of Detachment A-304
- 16 Insignia for Detachment A-405; the LLDB were the Vietnamese Special Forces; 'Vien Tham' meant Long Range Recon Patrol. The tiger was frequently worn on MIKE Force insignia
- 17 Pocket patch worn by members of the 7th Squadron, 1st Cavalry, which provided the helicopter support for the Detachment A-405 MIKE Force
- 18 Blazer/pocket patch for C-1 Mobile Strike Force

19 Patch for Project Snake Bite; note the US 'Master Blaster' parachute wings incorporated

20 Pocket insignia worn by graduates of the MACV Recondo School

21 Another version of the MACV RECONDO School Pocket insignia; note that there were various other versions of this patch

22 Military Assistance Command Vietnam/Special Operations Group pocket or blazer patch; note the incorporation of aviation wings and the anchor as well as the Special Forces skull denoting the multi-service nature of MACV/SOG

23 Pocket patch for Forward Operations Base 2 personnel; based at Kontum, this unit launched recon and other special missions

24 A variation of FOB-2 pocket patch: note that the skull and shellburst were standard features of many MACV/SOG insignia

25 Pocket patch for FOB-3, which was located at Khe Sanh



▲ Special Forces doctor prepares an injection; note the 5th Special Forces Group flash with major or lieutenant-colonel insignia

worn on the green beret. Other ranks would wear the Special Forces distinctive insignia on the beret. (US Army)

PLATE 8



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◀ US adviser wears MIKE Force insignia together with airborne and Ranger tabs. (US Army)

## PLATE 9: MACV/SOG INSIGNIA CONTINUED

- 26 Patch for FOB-4 located at DaNang
- 27 Patch for Command and Control North; the Command and Control groups replaced the FOBs; CCN was at DaNang
- 28 Another version of the CCN insignia
- 29 Still another CCN variation
- 30 Task Force 1 Advisory Element Communications Section; Task Force 1 replaced CCN; note the antennae attached to the skull and lighting bolts
- 31 Task Force 1 Advisory Element Medical Section; note that the traditional crossed daggers are replaced by crossed hypodermic needles
- 32 Command and Control Central pocket patch; CCC was located at Kontum
- 33 Variation of CCC
- 34 Variation of CCC
- 35 Variation of CCC
- 36 Special Operations Augmentation (CCC) pocket patch; note that the skull wears a hat rather than a beret; 'Augmentation' units were sometimes used to hide the actual assignment of Special Forces personnel to MACV/SOG operations
- 37 CCC Recon patch; this patch is often referred to as 'The Hulk' patch because of the creature; note that he is kicking a skull
- 38 Command and Control South pocket patch; CCS was located at Ban Me Thuot
- 39 Variation of CCS patch
- 40 Local National Security Group patch; note the Vietnamese airborne wings on patch
- 41 Recon Team Adder pocket patch; note that many recon teams were named after snakes
- 42 RT Alabama patch; many other teams were named after states
- 43 RT Alabama variant
- 44 RT Alabama patch; 'We Kill For Peace' was a popular, somewhat ironic, Special Forces motto
- 45 RT Anaconda patch
- 46 RT Anaconda variation; note that both identify the team as assigned to CCN
- 47 Another RT Anaconda variation
- 48 RT Arizona patch; the incorporation of the dragon probably indicates that the indigenous members of the team were Nungs (ethnic Chinese)
- 49 RT Arizona shoulder tab
- 50 RT Arkansas patch



PLATE 9



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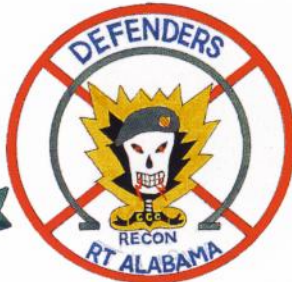
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## PLATE 10: MACV/SOG INSIGNIA CONTINUED

- 51 RT Arkansas variant; 'Loi Long' means 'Lightning Dragon' as do the Chinese characters; once again this team probably included Nung 'indigs'
- 52 RT Asp patch
- 53 RT Asp variation
- 54 RT California patch
- 55 RT California variation
- 56 RT California shoulder tab
- 57 RT Cobra patch
- 58 RT Colorado patch
- 59 RT Colorado variant
- 60 RT Connecticut patch; 'Epul Ede Ga' means 'Montagnard'
- 61 RT Crusader patch
- 62 RT Delaware patch
- 63 RT Diamondback patch; note that FOB-4 whence the team was launched is included on the insignia
- 64 RT Florida patch; many of the recon team insignia featured wry humour, in this case the alligator, typical of Florida, is chewing on a VC
- 65 RT Fork patch
- 66 RT Georgia patch; note inclusion of Confederate

flag and succinct summary of the team's view of Communism

- 67 RT Hawaii patch; reportedly this was the first RT to have a pocket patch thus helping to start the trend
- 68 RT Hotcake patch; playing on the team's name, the skull wears a chef's hat rather than the usual beret
- 69 RT Hunter patch; note that the snake curls around the skull in such a way as to resemble a beret
- 70 RT Idaho patch
- 71 RT Illinois patch
- 72 RT Indiana patch; the Montagnard crossbow in the upper right-hand portion of the shield is indicative of the 'indigs' on the team
- 73 RT Intruder patch; note the bends carrying the colours of the Republic of Vietnam
- 74 RT Iowa patch; the Chinese characters mean 'Lightning Tiger'
- 75 RT Kansas patch
- 76 RT Kentucky patch; the chess piece is an interesting inclusion representing Kentucky's famed horsebreeding, but also relating to war; in the author's experience some of the hand-made versions of this patch are so well-executed that they almost appear to be machine-made



◀ Members of the 1st Battalion, 75th Rangers at Fort Lewis, WA, apply camo makeup. Note the Ranger scroll. (US Army)

PLATE 10



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## PLATE 11: MACV/SOG INSIGNIA CONTINUED

- 77 RT Kentucky variant  
78 RT Krait patch  
79 CCC Launch Site patch; note that the man on the insignia is being 'launched'  
80 RT Lightning patch  
81 RT Lightning variation: note that 213 indicates assignment to CCS, while 214 indicates assignment to CCN; possibly the team switched launch sites at some point  
82 RT Louisiana patch  
83 RT Louisiana variant  
84 RT Louisiana variant  
85 RT Maine patch; the inclusion of the word 'Airborne' is of some interest as teams were rarely inserted by parachute  
86 RT Mamba patch; of interest is the inclusion of a submachine-gun on the patch rather than the M-16 or CAR-15 more commonly portrayed  
87 RT Mike Facs patch; note that the patch is very similar to those for Command and Control sites; 'Facs' stands for Forward Area Cambodia Surveillance – in simple terms this team carried out cross-border ops into Cambodia  
88 Mike Facs variant patch; note that the beret bears a Cambodian-style beret flash rather than the normal 5th SFG one  
89 RT Minnesota patch; the mushroom cloud is of interest as normally it is only encountered on very unauthorized patches worn by Special Forces teams specializing in the use of tactical nuclear weapons, something it is doubtful RT Minnesota did in South-east Asia  
90 RT Mississippi patch  
91 RT Missouri patch  
92 Mobile Launch Team-1; this team was located at Phu Bai  
93 Mobile Launch Team-2; this team was located at Quang Tri

- 94 RT Moccasin patch  
95 RT Moccasin patch  
96 RT Moccasin variant  
97 FOB Monkey Mountain patch; this Forward Operating Base was located at Camp Fay  
98 RT Montana patch  
99 RT Nevada patch; note that the word 'Battle' is split; on locally made insignia misspellings or odd breaks in words were quite common because employees of local tailor shops sewing the insignia were copying a language they could not read or write  
100 RT Nevada variation  
101 RT New Hampshire patch; the presence of the bat is of interest as it is frequently associated with Provincial Recon Units – the direct action arm of the Phoenix Program; however it is also used to indicate skill in night operations



► 9th Infantry Division LRRP in Vietnam wears the black beret with locally made beret flash and LRRP tab, the LRRP arc over 9th

Infantry Division subdued shoulder sleeve insignia, and locally made Recondo school patch on the pocket. (US Army)

PLATE 11



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## PLATE 12: MACV/SOG INSIGNIA CONTINUED

102 RT New Jersey patch; the Chinese characters mean 'Recon'

103 RT New Mexico patch; note that the poker hand is aces and eights, normally known as the 'Dead Man's Hand' because Wild Bill Hickock had this hand when killed. The Ace of Spades was often incorporated into insignia based on the idea that somehow this card was feared by the Communists. If true this is probably only because a few LRRP or other units used to leave Aces of Spades as 'calling cards' in the mouths of enemy killed

104 RT New York patch; the Grim Reaper was a fairly common icon on Vietnam insignia

105 RT North Carolina patch

106 RT Oregon patch

107 RT Pennsylvania patch

108 RT Plane patch

109 RT Plane shoulder tab

110 RT Prairie Fire patch; '18 Months North of the 17th Parallel' refers to the unit's mission in Laos

111 Laotian Expeditionary Force patch

112 RT Puerto Rico patch

113 RT Python patch

114 RT Rhode Island patch; note the presence once again of the Montagnard crossbow

115 RT Sidewinder patch

116 RT Sidewinder variation; note that 'Baru' is probably a misspelling of Bru, a Montagnard tribe

117 RT Spike patch

118 RT Tarantula patch

119 TL MACV patch

120 RT Texas shoulder tab

121 RT Texas patch

122 RT Trowell patch

123 RT Vermont patch

124 RT Viper patch

125 RT Viper variation

126 RT Virginia patch

▼Members of the 7th SFG (Airborne) undergoing winter guerrilla training. Note the early beret flash

and insignia on the man in the right foreground. (US Army)



PLATE 12



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◀ XVIII Airborne Corps specialist wears the XVIII Shoulder Sleeve Insignia. (US Army)

## PLATE 13: MACV/SOG INSIGNIA CONTINUED

- 127 RT Washington patch
- 128 RT Washington shoulder tab
- 129 RT Wasp patch
- 130 RT Wasp variation
- 131 RT Weather patch
- 132 RT West Virginia patch; this very garish patch is one that best typifies the more colourful MACV/SOG insignia. The author has seen this insignia backed by both Vietnamese newspaper and camouflage material, both typically used in small tailor shops. The Chinese characters stand for 'Kill VC'
- 133 An unidentified recon team patch
- 134 Another unknown recon team patch
- 135 A Company, CCC Exploitation Force patch
- 136 Variation of A Company, CCC Exploitation Force
- 137 B Company, CCC Exploitation Force tab
- 138 C Company, CCC Exploitation Force patch
- 139 D Company, CCC Exploitation Force patch
- 140 1st Company, CCS Exploitation Force patch
- 141 RT Ohio patch
- 142 Cambodian Expeditionary Force Special Forces

Advisers patch; the Cambodian characters stand for 'Khymer National Number One Raiders'; 'Number One' was used throughout South-east Asia to mean the best

- 143 Forward Operations Base patch
- 144 Project Delta pocket patch
- 145 Project Sigma pocket patch
- 146 Military Assistance Command Vietnam/Joint Prisoner Resolution Center patch; this unit, which remained in Vietnam based at Tan Son Nhut long after MACV/SOG had ceased to operate, was theoretically involved in determining the fate of POW/MIAs but carried out other clandestine missions as well
- 147 Son Tay Raider patch; note that the insignia shows the lightning strike of the raid into and out of the camp
- 148 Son Tay Air Force elements patch; 'KITD/FOHS' refers to the fact that the Air Force support elements were not privy to much of the information about the raid; hence, 'Kept in the Dark/Fed Only Horse Shit'!
- 149 USARVITG pocket Insignia
- 150 USARVITG subdued variation
- 151 Field Training Command pocket patch

PLATE 13



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## PLATE 14: COLOMBIA

Colombia's airborne forces came into existence with the formation of an airborne battalion in 1964. A parachute infantry battalion remains today based at Villavivencio. Additionally, within the army is a Lancero Battalion (equivalent to the US Rangers) and a Special Forces battalion. Among the approximately 1,500 Marines in Colombia are some airborne-qualified as well as a unit of combat swimmers.

Colombia's Lancero School is famous throughout Latin America for turning out tough jungle fighters. Located at the Colombian Army Infantry Centre at Tolemaida, the school gives one international course per year for students drawn from throughout Latin America. The school was originally established in 1955 to give specialized training to Colombian officers and NCOs. The course is divided into three phases. During Phase I (about six weeks) students learn to command small units and work on their physical training to prepare them for later phases. Phase II (about two weeks) involves field problems in rough terrain and adverse weather. Finally, Phase III (about two weeks) puts all the training together as students carry out small unit patrols and operations against aggressor forces.

- 1 Airborne beret badge
- 2 1st Airborne Battalion shoulder insignia and arc; note that normally Colombian infantry battalions are named after military heroes, but the airborne battalion is designated by its mission
- 3 1st Airborne Battalion shoulder insignia
- 4 Small pocket patch version of 1st Airborne Battalion insignia
- 5 Paratrooper shoulder arc
- 6 Cloth anti-guerrilla badge

- 7 Metal anti-guerrilla badge
- 8 Basic Special Forces qualification badge
- 9 Special Forces qualification badge in metal
- 10 Special Forces qualification badge in cloth
- 11 Arc worn by officers qualified as Lanceros, Commandos, parachutists
- 12 Lancero arc
- 13 Lancero pocket badge
- 14 Lancero shoulder insignia
- 15 Lancero School shoulder/pocket insignia
- 16 Lancero School graduate badge
- 17 Lancero School officer/instructor badge
- 18 Commando insignia
- 19 Commando de Selva qualification badge; this unit is composed of highly trained jungle fighters
- 20 Commando de Selva cloth insignia

## PLATE 14 CONTINUED: BOLIVIA

Bolivia has a paratroop battalion, two Ranger Regiments, and three Andean Regiments. The Rangers were trained by the US Special Forces and helped track down Che Guevara. Bolivian special operations units are assigned to various divisions as follows: 5th Lanza Andean Regiment to the 1st Division; 17th Illimani Andean Regiment and 24th Mendez Arcos Ranger Regiment to the 2nd Division; 19th Murillo Andean Regiment and the Parachute Battalion to the 7th Division; 12th Mancho Ranger Regiment to the 8th Division. Bolivian paratroopers wear a black beret.

- 1 Airborne beret badge
- 2 Airborne shoulder patch
- 3 2nd Ranger Battalion
- 4 Company B, Airborne; Special Forces training class patch from 1972



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## PLATE 15: BRAZIL

Brazil's first airborne troops began training shortly after the Second World War and when sufficient numbers had qualified at the parachute school in Rio de Janeiro a parachute brigade was formed. From members of this brigade the Brazilian Special Forces were created in 1957. Currently, Brazilian Army airborne/SF units consist of the 1st Parachute Brigade at Rio; the 1st-5th Jungle Warfare Battalions (special operations units) with headquarters at Manaus; and the 2nd Parachute Brigade at Brasilia.

In 1957, a reconnaissance company was formed for the Brazilian Marines which also includes airborne/scuba-trained personnel. This unit has expanded to become the Toneleros Special Operations Battalion.



▲ Very tough-looking Brazilian paratrooper illustrating the Brasil arc and airborne shoulder sleeve insignia. Also visible on the left breast are

Chilean and Venezuelan parachute brevets. On the right breast is what appears to be the jungle qualification badge. (Adrian Bohlen)

Brazilian jungle Commandos/special forces are trained at the Centro de Operacoes na Selva e Accoeo de Commandos at Manaus. Four courses per year in specialized jungle/Commando techniques for the Amazon region are taught at the centre. Among skills taught are demolitions, boobytraps, improvised landing fields, hydro and land navigation, mountain climbing, river crossing, survival, field medicine, jungle tactics, individual and small unit tactics. As can be seen, the course is quite similar to the US Ranger course.

- 1 Identification uncertain, but probably airborne beret badge
- 2 Same as No 1
- 3 Jungle Commando breast badge
- 4 Advanced army free-fall
- 5 Jungle Commando
- 6 Jungle Commando (gold is probably officer, silver NCO)
- 7 Cloth Jungle Commando badge
- 8 Expert Swimmer/Frogman
- 9 Brasil arc worn over parachute patch
- 10 Commandos arc
- 11 Special Forces arc
- 12 Airborne shoulder insignia
- 13 Jungle Commando School

## PLATE 15 CONTINUED: CHILE

Chile's airborne forces trace their history to 1965 when the Army Parachute Battalion was formed as was the Parachute and Special Forces School at Peldehue. Currently this school offers the basic parachute course taking four weeks and including five jumps, jump-master, pathfinder, rigger, and Commando courses. Currently, a parachute battalion comes under the Air Force, while the Boinas Negras Special Forces/Commando Battalion comes under the Army. There are also combat swimmers assigned to the Chilean Marines. In addition to their black beret, Chilean Special Forces are marked by their Corvo (a curved jungle knife with which they are very proficient).

- 1 Commando/Special Forces qualification; note: this is the Corvo fighting knife
- 2 Unidentified
- 3 Parachute rigger
- 4 Commandos of the Special Forces Squadron
- 5 Variant of No 4
- 6 Special Forces
- 7 Special Forces breast badge
- 8 Commandos/Special Forces shoulder patch
- 9 Commandos shoulder patch
- 10 Another version of the Commando shoulder patch
- 11 Commando shoulder arc
- 12 Tiger (special forces?) shoulder arc



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## PLATE 16: GUATEMALA

The first Guatemalan parachute company was formed in 1963, followed in 1967 by a special forces company, and in 1970 by another parachute company. In January 1971 these three units formed the 1st Parachute Battalion. In addition to this paratroop/special forces battalion, there is also a specialized counter-insurgency group with a special forces mission. The 1st Parachute Battalion is based at Base General Felipe Cruz about 65 miles south of Guatemala City. Many Guatemalan paratroopers have made combat jumps during the counter-insurgency war in that country. Members of the airborne units are identified by their black berets. Training includes five jumps for the basic parachute brevet, thirty jumps for expert, and 65 for master. As in US jump school, airborne training lasts three weeks.

1 Airborne beret badge

- 2 Airborne shoulder patch
- 3 1st Parachute Battalion shoulder patch
- 4 1st Parachute Company
- 5 Airborne shoulder tab
- 6 Subdued version of No 5
- 7 3rd Parachute Company (Type II)
- 8 3rd Parachute Company (Type I)
- 9 HQ Platoon, 3rd Parachute Company
- 10 1st Platoon, 3rd Parachute Company
- 11 2nd Platoon, 3rd Parachute Company
- 12 3rd Platoon, 3rd Parachute Company
- 13 4th Platoon, 3rd Parachute Company
- 14 Airborne Support Company
- 15 HQ Platoon, 1st Parachute Company
- 16 1st Platoon, 1st Parachute Company
- 17 2nd Platoon, 1st Parachute Company
- 18 3rd Platoon, 1st Parachute Company
- 19 4th Platoon, 1st Parachute Company



◀ Guatemalan paratrooper offers a good view of that country's airborne beret badge as well as the basic parachute brevet. (*Soldier of Fortune* magazine)

PLATE 16



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**PLATE 17: GUATEMALA  
CONTINUED**

- 20 2nd Parachute Company
- 21 HQ Platoon, 2nd Parachute Company
- 22 1st Platoon, 2nd Parachute Company
- 23 2nd Platoon, 2nd Parachute Company
- 24 3rd Platoon, 2nd Parachute Company
- 25 4th Platoon, 2nd Parachute Company

**PLATE 17 CONTINUED:  
EL SALVADOR**

El Salvador's first airborne company was formed in 1964. The current airborne battalion, though part of

the Army, falls under Air Force control. There are also two special forces groups. Parachute training lasts four weeks, during which six jumps are made. Until 1983, airborne troops wore a dark-blue beret, possibly because of their association with the Air Force, but since that time they have worn a maroon beret.

- 1 Officers' airborne collar insignia
- 2 Other ranks' airborne collar insignia
- 3 Airborne Commando Group
- 4 1st Airborne Squadron
- 5 2nd Airborne Squadron
- 6 HQ (Reserve) Platoon
- 7 Airborne Weapons Platoon
- 8 1st Airborne Platoon
- 9 2nd Airborne Platoon
- 10 3rd Airborne Platoon

PLATE 17



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# ASIA

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## PLATE 18: INDONESIA

Few if any countries can match Indonesia in its diversity of airborne/élite units. Shortly after Independence, Indonesia formed various parachute and parachute raider battalions until, in 1952, the Para-Commando Regiment was formed. This unit, RPKAD, includes not just parachute-qualified but also amphibious-qualified personnel. By 1976 the RPKAD had expanded to two brigades – the 17th and 18th – as well as four independent para-raider battalions. Additionally, there's a separate special forces command, known as KOPASSANDHA, which has two Para-Commando groups. Combat jumps were made by members of the Para-Commandos in 1958 on Sumatra and in 1962 on new Guinea.

Other units which included parachute personnel are the Indonesian Marines, part of whom are the KIPAM combat swimmers; the Air Force Quick Reaction Forces (KOPASGAT); and the National Police Mobile Brigade (PELIPOR).

This diversity required a number of training establishments. The army actually runs two schools, one in the Cimahi area near Bandung, Java, and another at Ujung Pandang, Sulawesi. Four parachute schools operate at Cimahi – Para Commando/Special Forces, Army Strategic Command (KOSTRAD), Raider, and Airborne Infantry. The Air Force operates its own school at Sulaiman Air Base at Bandung, Java. The Marines operate two schools – for Western forces at Jakarta, Java, and for Eastern forces at Surabaya, Java. The National Police run their school at Borong, Java. Various levels of parachute badge including free-fall are awarded to each of the services.

Berets are worn by the various élite units as follows: Special Forces/Commando red, Army Strategic Com-

mand light-green, Airborne Infantry dark-green, Air Force Rapid Reaction Force orange, Marine Paras violet, National Police Mobile Brigade dark-blue (almost black). In addition, Army Raiders wear a distinctive camo cap instead of a beret.

- 1 Cloth Parachute Commando qualification badge
- 2 Parachute Commando shoulder sleeve insignia
- 3 Commando shoulder arc
- 4 Variation of the Commando shoulder arc
- 5 Parachute Commando shoulder title
- 6 Unidentified
- 7 Cloth Parachute Commando qualification badge
- 8 Variation of the Parachute Commando qualification
- 9 Raider qualification badge in cloth
- 10 Unidentified
- 11 Airborne shoulder title
- 12 Airborne shoulder sleeve insignia
- 13 Metal Parachute Commando qualification badge
- 14 Metal Parachute Commando qualification badge
- 15 Raider qualification badge
- 16 Parachute Commando qualification badge
- 17 Unidentified
- 18 Metal Airborne badge
- 19 Commando qualification badge
- 20 Airborne shoulder sleeve insignia
- 21 Airborne shoulder sleeve insignia
- 22 Parachute Raider shoulder sleeve insignia
- 23 Raider shoulder sleeve insignia
- 24 Commando shoulder sleeve insignia
- 25 Raider shoulder title
- 26 Raider shoulder sleeve insignia
- 27 Commando shoulder sleeve insignia
- 28 Raider shoulder arc
- 29 Commando shoulder sleeve insignia

PLATE 18



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## PLATE 19: REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

The first Viet parachute unit was the 1st Indo-Chinese Parachute Company, formed in 1948 as part of the French colonial forces. Soon, Indo-Chinese parachute companies were attached to many of the French parachute battalions serving in Indo-China. Many of these companies were expanded to battalion strength, forming the basis for the Vietnamese Airborne Group after the French withdrawal. In 1959 this unit was redesignated the Airborne Brigade, then in 1965 the Airborne Division.

The Vietnamese Special Forces (the LLDB) were originally formed in 1958 as the Joint Operations Group expanding to the 31st and 77th Special Observation Battalions in 1959. As the Civilian Irregular Defense Group Program grew so did the number of LLDB Groups as the 81st, 606th and 660th were added. After the re-deployment of US Special Forces to the USA in 1971, the LLDB was re-organized into the 81st Special Airborne Battalion to carry out special ops within South Vietnam, the Liaison Office (which absorbed much of MACV/SOG's duties), and the Technical Directorate which carried out missions into North Vietnam.

Generally considered the best of South Vietnam's elite units were the Biet Dong Quan, the Viet Rangers. The ARVN Rangers were first formed in 1960 and initially served in company-strength units, later expanded to battalion strength. In 1967, the Rangers were organized into groups and became each corps tactical zone's primary reaction element. The Ranger Training Centre at Duc My was probably the best training facility within the entire ARVN structure. After the US Special Forces handed over the CIDG program to the Vietnamese, many of the most effective CIDG troops became ARVN Rangers.

Other Vietnamese troops trained for airborne/special operations included the MIKE Forces which were elite light infantry, often airborne-qualified, used as reaction forces directly under US Special Forces control. Also highly effective were the Provincial Recon Units, which included some airborne-trained troops and many

turned VC formed into the 'teeth' units of the Phoenix Program. Within the Viet Marines were highly trained personnel including some with a recon mission. Finally, the Vietnamese Navy had their own combat swimmer unit, the LDNN, similar to US Navy SEALs.

Vietnamese airborne troops wore the red beret; ARVN Rangers wore a maroon beret. Perhaps the best-known ARVN Ranger headgear, however, was the steel helmet with their Black Panther insignia painted on the helmet or the camo cover. LLDB wore green berets similar to their US advisers. PRUs wore different coloured berets depending on the province. Black, red, and green were most common.

- 1 Metal Airborne beret badge
- 2 Bullion Airborne beret badge
- 3 Cloth Airborne beret badge
- 4 Airborne Group shoulder sleeve insignia
- 5 Another version of the Airborne Group SSI; note colour similarities to the British Parachute Regiment
- 6 Airborne Brigade SSI
- 7 Airborne Division SSI
- 8 Cloth jump status indicator badge
- 9 Metal jump status indicator badge
- 10 Unidentified
- 11 2nd Parachute Medical Battalion cloth pocket crest
- 12 1st Parachute Medical Battalion cloth
- 13 3rd Parachute Medical Battalion cloth
- 14 1st Parachute Battalion metal
- 15 2nd Parachute Battalion metal
- 16 3rd Parachute Battalion metal
- 17 5th Parachute Battalion metal
- 18 6th Parachute Battalion metal
- 19 7th Parachute Battalion metal
- 20 8th Parachute Battalion metal
- 21 9th Parachute Battalion metal
- 22 11th Parachute Battalion metal; note: for the Vietnamese the number '10' meant 'the worst', hence the lack of a battalion so designated
- 23 Parachute Artillery Battalion
- 24 Parachute Medical Battalion
- 25 1st Parachute Battalion silk

PLATE 19



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## PLATE 20: REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM AIRBORNE AND RANGER

- 26 2nd Parachute Battalion silk
- 27 3rd Parachute Battalion silk
- 28 5th Parachute Battalion silk
- 29 6th Parachute Battalion silk
- 30 7th Parachute Battalion silk
- 31 8th Parachute Battalion silk
- 32 9th Parachute Battalion silk
- 33 11th Parachute Battalion silk
- 34 Parachute Artillery Battalion silk
- 35 Parachute Engineer Battalion silk
- 36 Parachute Medical Battalion silk
- 37 Parachute Signal Battalion silk
- 38 Parachute Support Battalion silk
- 39 Unidentified
- 40 Unidentified

- 1 Ranger branch insignia
- 2 Ranger beret badge
- 3 Ranger pocket insignia
- 4 Ranger breast qualification badge, metal
- 5 Ranger breast qualification badge, cloth
- 6 Ranger breast qualification badge, cloth, subdued
- 7 Ranger breast qualification badge, variation on camouflage; note, there are numerous cloth variations of this badge, manufactured in local areas of Vietnam, often sewn directly on to uniforms
- 8 Ranger Tab
- 9 Ranger Tab

▼ Good view of the ARVN  
airborne beret badge (left)  
and the 5th Special Forces

Group (Airborne) beret  
badge (right). (US Army)



PLATE 20



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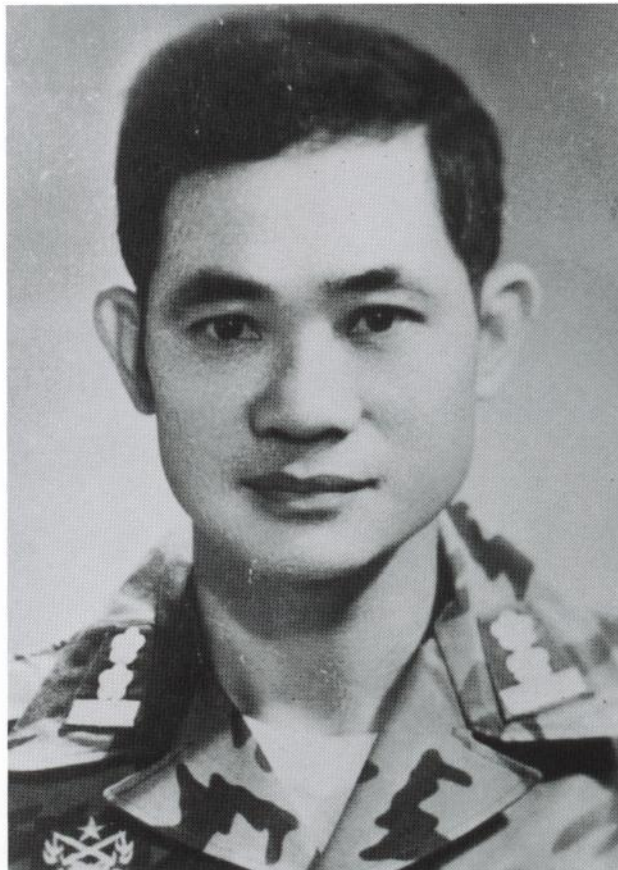
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## PLATE 21: REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM RANGERS

- 10 Ranger arc; note, on Ranger tabs and arcs, the colour normally indicates which of the four tactical zones the Rangers were assigned to as follows: Green-I, Red-II, Maroon-III. and Yellow-IV
- 11 Another version of the Ranger arc
- 12 Ranger arc/Border Defense (Border Defense Rangers helped interdict infiltration routes)
- 13 US Ranger adviser arc for the Duc My Ranger Training Centre
- 14 US Ranger adviser arc for the Ranger High Command
- 15 US Ranger adviser arc for III Corps Rangers
- 16 US Ranger adviser arc for the 34th Ranger Battalion
- 17 US Ranger adviser arc for the 41st Ranger Battalion
- 18 US Ranger adviser arc for the 30th Ranger Battalion
- 19 US Ranger adviser arc for the TNF Company
- 20 Border Defense arc
- 21 Border Defense arc (subdued)
- 22 Reconnaissance arc
- 23 Special Reconnaissance Infiltration arc
- 24 Ranger arc
- 25 Reconnaissance arc
- 26 Reconnaissance arc
- 27 Reconnaissance scroll
- 28 Reconnaissance scroll
- 29 Bing Long Province arc
- 30 Ranger tab; note, normally on these tabs the colour indicates province as discussed above, the boxed number at left indicates the battalion or team; for example, this tab is for 33rd Ranger Group Administration based in III Corps
- 31 32nd Battalion 2nd Ranger Group
- 32 21st Battalion, 1st Ranger Group
- 33 77th Ranger Battalion
- 34 23rd Battalion, 2nd Ranger Group

- 35 96th Battalion, 21st Ranger Group
- 36 23rd Battalion, 2nd Ranger Group
- 37 Command and Service Group, 3rd Ranger Group
- 38 52nd Battalion, 3rd Ranger Group
- 39 5th Ranger Battalion
- 40 30th Battalion, 5th Ranger Group
- 41 Artillery, 32nd Ranger Group



▲Vietnamese Ranger officer shows the ARVN Ranger qualification badge

on the right breast. (Society of Vietnamese Rangers)

PLATE 21



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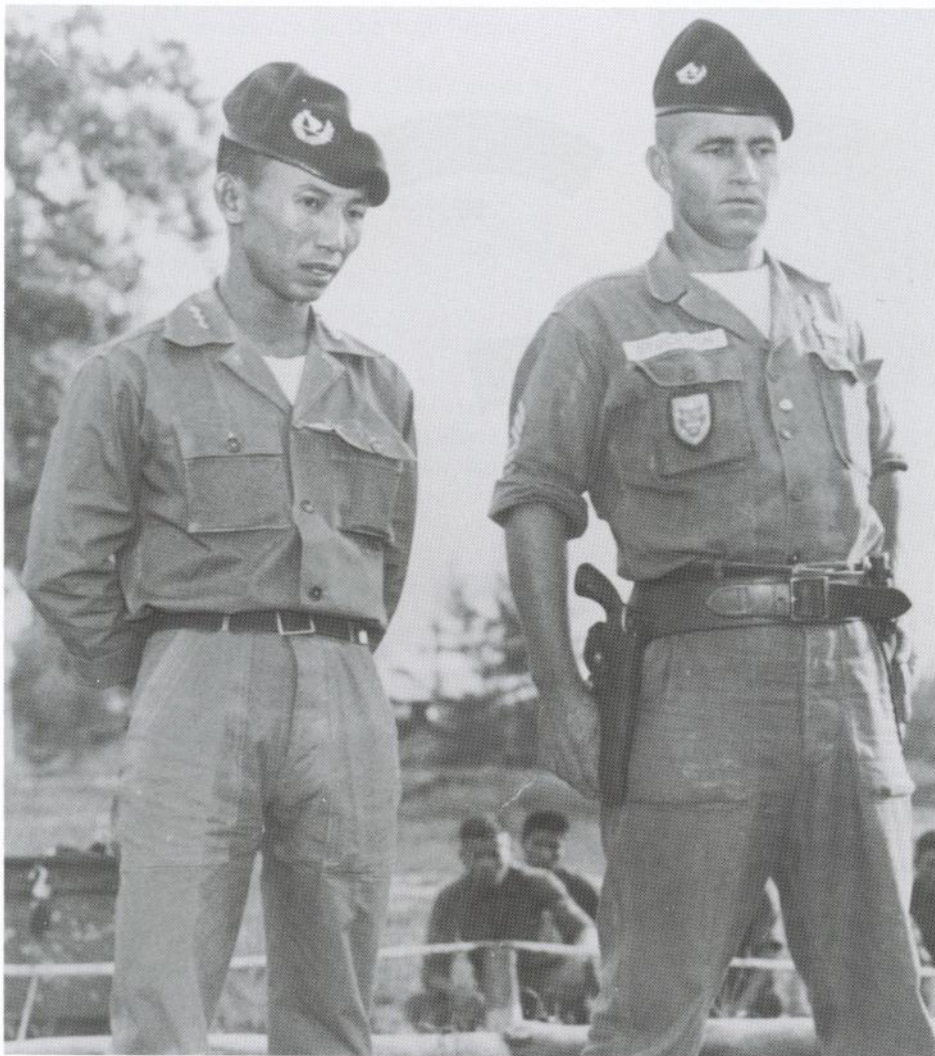


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## PLATE 22: REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM RANGERS

- 42 7th Ranger Group
- 43 Radar, 7th Ranger Group
- 44 85th Battalion, 7th Ranger Group
- 45 7th Ranger Group
- 46 7th Ranger Group
- 47 86th Ranger Battalion
- 48 41st Ranger Battalion, 4th Ranger Group
- 49 44th Ranger Battalion, 4th Ranger Group shoulder slide
- 50 42nd Ranger Battalion, 4th Ranger Group shoulder slide
- 51 Ranger shoulder insignia and small distinctive insignia version
- 52 Unidentified
- 53 Ranger Training Centre pocket insignia
- 54 Cambodian Expedition pocket insignia
- 55 Ranger Unit pocket insignia
- 56 BDQ (Ranger) pocket or shoulder insignia
- 57 Ranger pocket insignia (subdued)
- 58 Ranger pocket insignia (semi-subdued)
- 59 33rd Ranger Group Artillery tab and insignia
- 60 35th Ranger Battalion tab and insignia
- 61 3rd Ranger Group tab and insignia
- 62 31st Ranger Battalion, 3rd Ranger Group tab and insignia
- 63 38th Ranger Battalion, 5th Ranger Group tab and insignia
- 64 7th Ranger Group tab and insignia
- 65 Ranger Group communications
- 66 Ranger administration
- 67 Variant Ranger pocket insignia
- 68 Variant Ranger pocket insignia ('Sat Cong' means 'Kill Communists')



◀At the ARVN Ranger training centre a Vietnamese instructor and his American counterpart wear maroon BDQ berets with the Ranger beret and badge. The American also wears the Ranger pocket patch. (US Army)

PLATE 22



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## PLATE 23: REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM RANGERS

- 69 Reconnaissance Force pocket insignia  
70 Old-style III Corps Ranger insignia  
71 Subdued version of No. 74  
72 III Corps Reconnaissance pocket insignia  
73 II Corps Reconnaissance pocket insignia  
74 II Corps Ranger pocket insignia  
75 3rd Sector, III Corps Ranger pocket insignia  
76 Ranger Reconnaissance pocket insignia  
77 Ranger Reconnaissance pocket insignia  
78 Ranger pocket insignia  
79 71st Border Defense Ranger Battalion  
80 74th Ranger Battalion  
81 23rd Ranger Battalion Reconnaissance pocket insignia  
82 33rd Ranger Group Administration tab and pocket insignia  
83 11th Ranger Battalion pocket insignia; Vietnamese phrase at top translates as 'To have the courage to win'
- 84 33rd Ranger Battalion pocket insignia  
85 Variation of No. 84  
86 Another variation of No. 84  
87 41st Ranger Battalion pocket insignia; note that unlike most Ranger insignia which use the leopard, this insignia incorporates the Ranger beret badge  
88 74th Ranger Battalion shoulder loop  
89 91st Ranger Battalion (Airborne); note the inclusion of the parachute – not all ARVN Rangers were airborne-qualified  
90 Reconnaissance pocket insignia  
91 Special Reconnaissance pocket insignia  
92 Airborne Reconnaissance pocket insignia  
93 Unidentified Reconnaissance Unit; Vietnamese phrase translates as 'Ready to die'
- ▼Vietnamese paratroopers (note the shoulder sleeve insignia on the soldier in the right foreground) undergo survival training with the 1st Special Forces Group. (US Army)





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## PLATE 24: REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM SPECIAL FORCES

- 1 LLDB original beret badge
- 2 Final version of LLDB beret badge in bullion
- 3 Final LLDB beret badge in cloth
- 4 Joint Observation Battalion
- 5 31st Special Forces Battalion
- 6 77th Special Forces Battalion
- 7 606th Special Forces Battalion
- 8 660th Special Forces Battalion
- 9 LLDB pocket insignia
- 10 Variant of No. 9
- 11 Variant of No. 9
- 12 Subdued version of No. 9
- 13 Airborne Ranger ('Nhay Du' means airborne); this patch was always known as the 'Tony the Tiger' patch after the breakfast cereal character
- 14 77th Special Forces Battalion (phrase at top translates as 'Honour and Gallantry')
- 15 81st Special Forces Group
- 16 81st Special Forces Group strike company
- 17 81st Special Forces Group Intelligence unit
- 18 81st Special Forces Battalion pocket insignia
- 19 I.D. not certain, but probably a variant 81st Special Forces Battalion insignia
- 20 81st Special Forces Battalion variant of No. 18
- 21 81st Special Forces Battalion Lightning Force
- 22 81st Special Forces Battalion Reconnaissance Force
- 23 Technical Directorate
- 24 Technical Directorate variant
- 25 Technical Directorate variant
- 26 Technical Directorate variant
- 27 Technical Directorate; note the depiction of the coffin – missions carried out by this unit were often considered suicide missions; Vietnamese phrase translates as 'Honour Nation'
- 28 Technical Directorate (Vietnamese phrase translates as 'Invisible Boundary')
- 29 Liaison Office
- 30 Command and Control Central (Chinese letters translate as 'Reconnaissance')
- 31 Reconnaissance Team Loi Ho
- 32 Task Force 1
- 33 Command and Control South

▼Member of the Viet  
Special Forces, the LLDB,  
in the centre, wears the

green beret with the later  
version of the LLDB beret  
badge. (US Army)



PLATE 24



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## PLATE 25: REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

- 34 Reconnaissance Team Truong Son
- 35 Liaison Office Exploitation Force
- 36 Exploitation Force ('Tham-Tu' means 'suicide')
- 37 235th Exploitation Force (exploitation forces were rapidly inserted into an area when reconnaissance forces encountered the enemy)
- 38 Exploitation Force ('BD Tap Kich' means 'Special Raiding Force')
- 39 Exploitation Force (Border Force)
- 40 Lang Thanh Training School
- 41 Unknown reconnaissance/exploitation force; 'Quyét To' means 'Ready to Die'
- 42 Same as No. 41
- 43 Buon Mi Ga Mobile Guerrilla Force
- 44 Buon Sar Pa Mobile Guerrilla Force; note the bow which normally indicates a Montagnard unit
- 45 E. Pul Blar Wang Mobile Guerrilla Force
- 46 Rhade Mobile Guerrilla Force (The Rhade were the largest Montagnard tribe)
- 47 Koho Mobile Guerrilla Force
- 48 Darlac Province Mobile Guerrilla Force
- 49 5th Mobile Strike Force Command
- 50 Camp Strike Force
- 51 C-1 MIKE Force
- 52 C-2 MIKE Force

- 53 Mobile Strike Force
- 54 C-1 MIKE Reaction Force
- 55 3rd MIKE Force Battalion, II Corps
- 56 C-3 MIKE Force
- 57 C-4 MIKE Force
- 58 C-4 MIKE Force
- 59 Mobile Strike Force pocket patch
- 60 Eagle Flight (Eagle Flights were quick reaction forces prior to the formation of the MIKE Forces)
- 61 Mobile Strike Force
- 62 Mobile Strike Force
- 63 Mobile Strike Force
- 64 Mobile Strike Force (Vietnamese phrase translates as, 'Honourable Death Rather than a Shameful Life')
- 65 Duc Lap Civilian Irregular Defense Group
- 66 CIDG Tay Ninh Province
- 67 Reconnaissance Teams
- 68 Nung Security Detachment; (The Nungs were ethnic Chinese who made excellent soldiers. Because of their loyalty, US Special Forces normally used them as special security forces at SF installations)

▼General Westmoreland and Secretary of Defense McNamara inspect Vietnamese troops including the airborne

trooper in the left foreground who offers a good view of the bullion airborne beret badge. (US Army)



PLATE 25



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## PLATE 26: REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

69 Provincial Reconnaissance Unit pocket insignia (the PRUs were mercenaries, in many cases turned Communists, and provided the 'teeth' for the Phoenix Program)

70 Another PRU insignia

71 Tay Ninh Province PRU

72 Bien Hoa Province PRU

73 Phong Dinh Province PRU

74 Bien Thuan Province PRU

75 Binh Tuy Province PRU

76 Kien Giang Province PRU

77 Kien Hoa Province PRU

78 Phuoc Lang Province PRU

79 Quang Nam Province PRU

80 Quang Ngai Province PRU

81 Quang Tri Province PRU

82-84 Unidentified PRUs

85-89 LDNN (Vietnamese SEAL) breast badges. The different colours outlining the scuba gear identified the sub-units

90 Another version of the LDNN qualification badge

91 LDNN pocket patch

92 Another version of the LDNN pocket patch

93 Explosive Ordnance Disposal pocket patch

94 LDNN pocket patch

▼Vietnamese parachutists serving in the French Army during the Indo-China War sport jaunty

maroon berets and French parachute brevets on the distinctive French camo jump smock. (ECP)





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## PLATE 27: CAMBODIA

The history of Cambodia's elite units roughly parallels that of Vietnam in that the original parachute and Commando units were formed as part of the French colonial forces in Indo-China. As the counter-insurgency war in South-east Asia engulfed Cambodia as well, that country's elite light infantry forces expanded to include airborne, special forces, *choc* (shock), and Commando troops. By 1970, there were two parachute brigades – the 1st and 2nd – with seven parachute battalions. Because the US Special Forces worked closely with Cambodian elite forces throughout the 1960s and 1970s and because at least some Cambodian special operations personnel were trained in Vietnam, there will be many similarities with US/Viet elite insignia.

- 1 Airborne beret badge
- 2 Special Forces beret badge
- 3 Crossed arrows and dagger would indicate this is a Special Forces flash and beret badge
- 4 Airborne reconnaissance brevet
- 5 Airborne collar insignia
- 6 Cloth collar insignia

- 7 Special Forces shoulder insignia; note the influence of the US Special Forces insignia
- 8 Another version of the Special Forces SSI
- 9 Reconnaissance Team cap badge
- 10 Training detachment scroll, perhaps worn by US personnel
- 11 Airborne shoulder insignia and arc
- 12 Another airborne shoulder insignia
- 13 Airborne HQ
- 14 1st Parachute Brigade
- 15 3rd Airborne Battalion
- 16 Airborne Reconnaissance Teams
- 17 Probably airborne maintenance detachment
- 18 Unidentified
- 19 Possibly 21st *Bataillon de Choc*
- 20 Possibly 103rd *Bataillon de Choc*
- 21 Possibly 205th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 22 Medium Range Reconnaissance pocket patch
- 23 Unidentified reconnaissance unit
- 24 701st *Bataillon de Choc*
- 25 68th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 26 3rd Infantry Division Reconnaissance
- 27 20th *Bataillon de Choc*



◀ *The effectiveness of good camouflage is well demonstrated in this illustration. The year is 1975, and we see members of the 1st Parachute Brigade, well armed, ready to break cover in fighting around the suburbs of Pnom Penh.*



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## PLATE 28: CAMBODIA

- 28 Reconnaissance pocket patch
- 29 1st Infantry Division Reconnaissance
- 30 Mid Range Reconnaissance Patrol pocket patch
- 31 4th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 32 86th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 33 46th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 34 53rd *Bataillon de Choc*
- 35 10th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 36 197th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 37 285th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 38 317th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 39 319th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 40 324th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 41 509th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 42 524th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 43 537th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 44 537th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 45 606th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 46 607th *Bataillon de Choc*
- 47 Unidentified
- 48 Unidentified
- 49 Unidentified
- 50 Unidentified
- 51 Unidentified



◀ Another shotr of the 1st Parachute Brigade, preparing for combat in the Pnom Penh area in 1975.

PLATE 28



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## **PLATE 29: TAIWAN**

Under the OSS, various parachute-trained Chinese units were formed during the Second World War. Then, after the war's end, a Parachute Corps was formed within the Nationalist forces, based upon parachute Commando units trained during the war. Parachute units remained among those which fled to Taiwan as the Communists seized power. Among these were Intelligence operatives with parachute training used to infiltrate the mainland. Also formed in 1958 was the 1st Special Forces Group of about 2,500 men. It was followed over the next few years by the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th SF Groups. Currently, Taiwan still fields these four Special Forces Groups as well as the 1st and 2nd Airborne Battle Groups (Brigades) of the Army. Special Long Range Amphibious Reconnaissance teams and both Army and Marine combat swimmers also exist.

- 1** Dragons Parachute Team pocket patch
- 2** Iron Men Parachute Team pocket patch
- 3** Variation of the Iron Men pocket patch
- 4** Special Forces pocket patch

- 5** Special Forces pocket patch, possibly parachute team
- 6** Special Forces pocket patch
- 7** Special Forces assigned to the 4th Division
- 8** Special Forces rough terrain unit
- 9** Special Forces rough terrain variant
- 10** Special Forces rough terrain unit
- 11–15** Special Forces patches; note the arrowhead of the US Special Forces which helped train the Taiwan SF; colours probably indicate different battalions since each group has five battalions
- 16** Unidentified
- 17** Unknown but possibly aerial delivery unit
- 18** Variant of No. 17
- 19** Variant of No. 17
- 20** Unidentified airborne unit
- 21** Airborne pocket patch
- 22** Special Forces Special Training Detachment
- 23** Variant of No. 22
- 24** Variant of No. 22
- 25** Political Warfare Commando unit assigned to the off-shore front



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## **PLATE 30: TAIWAN**

- 26** Off-shore Commando unit
- 27** Off-shore Commando unit
- 28** Off-shore Commando unit
- 29** Commando
- 30** Commando
- 31** Commando
- 32** Commando
- 33** Commando
- 34** Commando
- 35** Divisional Commando
- 36** Divisional Commando
- 37** Divisional Commando
- 38** Commando
- 39** Commando
- 40** Long Range Amphibious Reconnaissance
- 41** Marine Combat Swimmer
- 42** Navy Commando, Matsu Islands
- 43** Army Commando, Kinman Island
- 44** Unidentified, probably scuba/amphibious unit
- 45** Unidentified, probably scuba/amphibious unit
- 46** Scuba pocket patch
- 47** LRRP Team badge
- 48** Amphibious Reconnaissance Team badge
- 49** Scuba Team badge
- 50** Special Forces Scuba



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## **PLATE 31: TAIWAN**

- 51** Army Scuba
- 52** Underwater Demolition; Note, this patch is very similar to those used by US Navy SEAL and UDT units
- 53** Underwater Demolition Team 2
- 54** UDT
- 55** Army Combat Swimmer
- 56** Unidentified, possibly Chinese Marines Amphibious Raider
- 57** Unidentified, possibly Amphibious Raider
- 58** Marine Commando, junk force raider units
- 59** Unidentified, possibly Amphibious Raider
- 60** Unidentified, possibly Amphibious Raider
- 61** Marine Commando, junk force raider
- 62** Marine Commando, junk force raider
- 63** Marine Amphibious Raider
- 64** Army Commando arc
- 65** Navy Commando arc
- 66–68** Off-shore Commando arcs
- 69** Special Forces sniper arc
- 70** Commando arc
- 71** Special Forces arc
- 72** HALO team
- 73** HALO
- 74** Sky Diver Team
- 75** HALO

PLATE 31



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## **PLATE 32: REPUBLIC OF KOREA**

South Korea's first parachute troops were those assigned to the United Nations Partisans in Korea during the Korean War. This was a guerrilla unit which operated in North Korea for raiding and intelligence gathering. Later the ROK Army included 1st and 5th Parachute Brigades as well as Special Forces units. Korean Special Forces personnel, who wear a distinctive black beret, served in Vietnam. In the mid 1970s, Korean Ranger units and the two airborne brigades were converted to Special Forces Brigades. In addition to the Special Warfare HQ and Command there are the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, 11th and 13th Special Forces Brigades. At the Special Warfare School near Seoul parachute, HALO, scuba, and other specialized training is given. Ranger training is given by individual units and at the ROK Infantry School. Each Infantry Division has a Reconnaissance Battalion members of which are normally Airborne- and Ranger-qualified. Other airborne-qualified units include the ROK Marine Reconnaissance Battalion, Navy Combat Swimmers (UDT), and Air Force Combat Control and Pararescue.

- 1** Special Forces beret badge
- 2** Variant of No. 1

- 3** Parachute School distinctive insignia
- 4** 1st Parachute Brigade distinctive insignia
- 5** 1st Parachute Brigade
- 6** 1st Parachute Brigade
- 7** 5th Airborne Battalion
- 8** Unidentified airborne unit
- 9** Probably 5th Parachute Brigade
- 10** Airborne Brigade HQ
- 11** Unidentified, possibly old-style 1st Special Forces Brigade
- 12** Unidentified, probably old-style 9th Special Forces Brigade
- 13** Special Warfare Centre
- 14** 1st Special Forces Brigade
- 15** 3rd Special Forces Brigade
- 16** 5th Special Forces Brigade
- 17** 7th Special Forces Brigade
- 18** 9th Special Forces Brigade
- 19** 11th Special Forces Brigade
- 20** 13th Special Forces Brigade
- 21** Basic Ranger qualification
- 22** Advanced Ranger qualification
- 23** Ranger cloth
- 24** Ranger cloth variant

PLATE 32



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## PLATE 33: REPUBLIC OF KOREA

- 25 Airborne Ranger
- 26 Marine Corps Airborne Ranger
- 27 Marine Corps Airborne Ranger variant
- 28 Ranger
- 29 Unidentified
- 30 Ranger variant
- 31 Marine UDT
- 32 Army UDT
- 33 Marine Combat Swimmer
- 34 Unidentified Combat Swimmer
- 35 Scuba detachment
- 36 Parachute Amphibious Reconnaissance

- 37 Senior Parachute Amphibious Reconnaissance
- 38 Master Parachute Amphibious Reconnaissance
- 39 Marine Senior Parachute Amphibious Reconnaissance
- 40 Marine Master Amphibious Reconnaissance: note, symbols on insignia indicate that qualifications include airborne, Ranger, small boat
- 41 Marine Senior Amphibious Reconnaissance variant
- 42 Basic Marine Amphibious Reconnaissance
- 43 Basic Marine Amphibious Reconnaissance without airborne wings
- 44 Amphibious Reconnaissance pocket patch



◀ Republic of Korea Special Forces soldier wearing the black beret and beret badge. (US Army)



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# MIDDLE EAST

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## PLATE 34: IRAN

Under the Shah, the Iranians fielded an Airborne Brigade – the 25th – and a Special Forces Brigade as well as specialized mountain Commandos. Many of these units were decimated during the revolution and the war with Iraq, but enough remained to carry out special operations, with the Revolutionary Guards, during the fighting. Iranian Special Forces had also seen action beside the British SAS in Oman. Like the US Special Forces who trained them, Iranian Special Forces traditionally have worn the green beret.

- 1 Airborne beret badge
- 2 Another form of the airborne beret badge

- 3 Airborne shoulder sleeve insignia
- 4 Another version of the airborne shoulder sleeve insignia
- 5 Unidentified shoulder sleeve insignia, possibly Ranger or special forces
- 6 Ranger badge
- 7 Mountain Ranger badge
- 8 Special Forces insignia showing the influence of US Special Forces training teams
- 9 Variation of the Ranger insignia
- 10 Another Ranger insignia, possibly of Ranger-qualified members of the Royal Guard
- 11 Special Forces insignia
- 12 Special Forces insignia



◀ Iranian Special Forces trooper offers view of the Iranian SF badge.

## PLATE 34 CONTINUED: ISRAEL

Israel's first parachute unit was formed in 1948. Since then the paratroops have acted as elite shock infantry in each of Israel's wars, though the only two combat jumps came during the 1956 war. This first airborne unit was designated the 890th Parachute Battalion, but in 1954 it was amalgamated with Unit 101, a cross-border raiding unit, to become Unit 202 and eventually the 202nd Parachute Brigade. A reserve brigade was soon added to create a Parachute Corps. By the 1980s

- 1 Infantry beret badge, worn by paratroopers on their red berets
- 2 Airborne Commando
- 3 Aerial Delivery
- 4 Airborne Engineers
- 5 Rigger
- 6 Free-fall paratroop
- 7 Unidentified
- 8 35th Parachute Brigade arm shield
- 9 Parachute School arm shield
- 10 Commando qualification badge



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there were five parachute brigades in existence – 8th, 13th, 29th, 31st and 35th.

Special reconnaissance units known as 'Sayaret' function as LRRPs within the Israeli Army, the most highly trained of these units being 'Sayaret Matkal'. Matkal roughly translates as GHQ and indicates the unit's assignment directly to the Chief of Intelligence. This unit is Israel's deep penetration raiding force and counter-terrorist unit. It is drawn heavily from airborne personnel.

Also considered élite within the Israeli Army is the Golani Brigade, which though armoured infantry, often functions in a role akin to the US Rangers.

Combat swimmers of the Israeli navy can carry out underwater infiltration and other typical frogman missions.

Israeli airborne training includes a rigorous selection course, but jump school lasts only three weeks during which men make five jumps – three day and two night. Women undergo a two-week course during which they

make three day jumps. To be designated an advanced parachutist requires fifty jumps. An instructor-jumpmaster has to complete the six months' instructor course and have made at least sixty jumps. Upon completing this course, an instructor is eligible for the free-fall rating after making at least ten free-fall jumps.

Israeli paras wear a red beret and members of the Golani Brigade wear a brown beret. Another noteworthy distinction is the coloured plastic background to the parachute badge. White designates an instructor, red a combat jump, green a Commando, blue basic para status, and black formerly meant a water jump or 'Armour Commando'. As of 1983, graduates of the airborne school assigned to any infantry unit wear the green background as do airborne-qualified Commandos. Parachute-qualified troops assigned to other branches still wear the wings on the blue background. Anyone with a double qualification may wear more than one colour backing overlapping.

## **PLATE 35: ISRAEL**

- 11 Airborne Central Command arm shield
- 12 Unidentified
- 13 Airborne Maintenance
- 14 Airborne Brigade
- 15 Airborne Commando (Southern Command)
- 16 Unidentified
- 17 Airborne Brigade Reserve
- 18 Airborne School (Special) (i.e., snipers, etc.)

- 19 Airborne Infantry School
- 20 29th Parachute Brigade
- 21 Unidentified
- 22 Airborne Artillery
- 23 Unidentified
- 24 Airborne Brigade Reserve
- 25 Airborne Unit Reserve
- 26 Airborne Division Reserve
- 27 Unidentified
- 28 13th Parachute Brigade



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## PLATE 36: SYRIA

Syria's first parachute unit was formed in 1958 and by the 1970s had increased to three battalions. Additionally, there are eight Commando battalions organized into two brigades. The Presidential Guard Unit is trained for the special forces mission as well. During the Yom Kippur War, Syrian Commandos particularly won the admiration of Israel's Golani Brigade and the paratroopers who had to dislodge them from positions on the Golan Heights. Men of the 82nd Parachute Battalion took part in this fighting as well. Once again, during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Syrian Commandos proved their toughest opposition.

The Syrians refer to their Commando battalions as 'Fugs'; they are comprised of three highly trained companies of airmobile elite infantry. The Syrians seem to make it a point to commit their Commandos to combat as frequently as possible thus reinforcing their training and *esprit de corps* with combat experience.

- 1 1st Commando Battalion badge; note the 1st Battalion uses a black shield; each of the other seven battalions uses a different colour
- 2 Commando Battalion badge
- 3 Commando Battalion badge
- 4 Variation of Nos. 1-3
- 5 Variation of Nos. 1-3
- 6 Insignia of one of the two Commando Brigades
- 7 Commando Brigade insignia; the purpose of the black bar is not known
- 8 Airborne Brigade patch
- 9 Commando Brigade insignia



▲ Syrian paratrooper wearing the very colourful,

late-style parachutist's brevet. (Adrian Bohlen)

## PLATE 36 CONTINUED: MOROCCO

Morocco has a parachute brigade, members of which have seen action when on detachment with the Syrians against Israel and on detachment in Zaire. Others fought against insurgents in the Spanish Sahara. The brigade is based near Rabat International Airport at the same installation where the Moroccan parachute school is located. Parachute troops wear the same green beret worn by other members of the Army.

Within its Gendarmerie, Morocco also has a counter-terrorist unit bearing the same initials (GIGN) as the French counter-terrorist unit.

- 1 Airborne collar insignia
- 2 Airborne pocket badge (normally with green background rather than grey)
- 3 Variation of No. 2

## PLATE 36 CONTINUED: SUDAN

Sudan's airborne forces were founded in 1962 when a group of instructors was trained in Great Britain, but the Sudanese Parachute Battalion was not formed until 1964. Currently, the Sudan has an 'Airborne Corps' based with the Parachute Training Centre at Khartoum. There is also an airborne Ranger unit as well. The basic airborne course consists of one month's physical training (to some extent based on the British P Company), then three weeks of ground and jump training including six jumps – three day, one day with deployment of the reserve chute, one day with equipment, and one night jump. Also receiving airborne training is the 144th Counter Terrorist Unit, one of the better such units in Africa. Airborne personnel wear a maroon beret.

- 1 Airborne officers' beret badge
- 2 Airborne shoulder tab
- 3 Airborne other ranks' beret badge
- 4 Airborne shoulder insignia

## PLATE 36 CONTINUED: AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan had an entire Special Forces Brigade – the 444th Commando Brigade – which was airborne qualified; however, through desertions and combat losses, this unit's strength may have fallen to battalion or less during the fighting against the Mujahadeen. At one point there was also a separate airborne battalion.

- 5 Airborne battalion shoulder insignia
- 6 444th Commando Brigade shoulder insignia



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## PLATE 36 CONTINUED: IRAQ

During the 1960s Iraq formed a Special Forces Brigade with parachute and Commando troops. Members of this brigade saw action against the Israelis in the Yom Kippur War. Reportedly, too, many operations against the Iranians were carried out by Iraqi special forces during the Iran-Iraq War.

- 1 Airborne beret or collar insignia
- 2 Airborne shoulder insignia, worn on both shoulders
- 3 Special Forces Brigade insignia
- 4 Parachute School insignia

## PLATE 36 CONTINUED: ALGERIA

Although Algeria had colonial parachute troops under the French, it was not until shortly after achieving independence in 1962 that Algerian Parachute Commando Battalions were formed under Soviet instruction.

- 1 Parachute Commando breast badge
- 2 Variation of No. 1

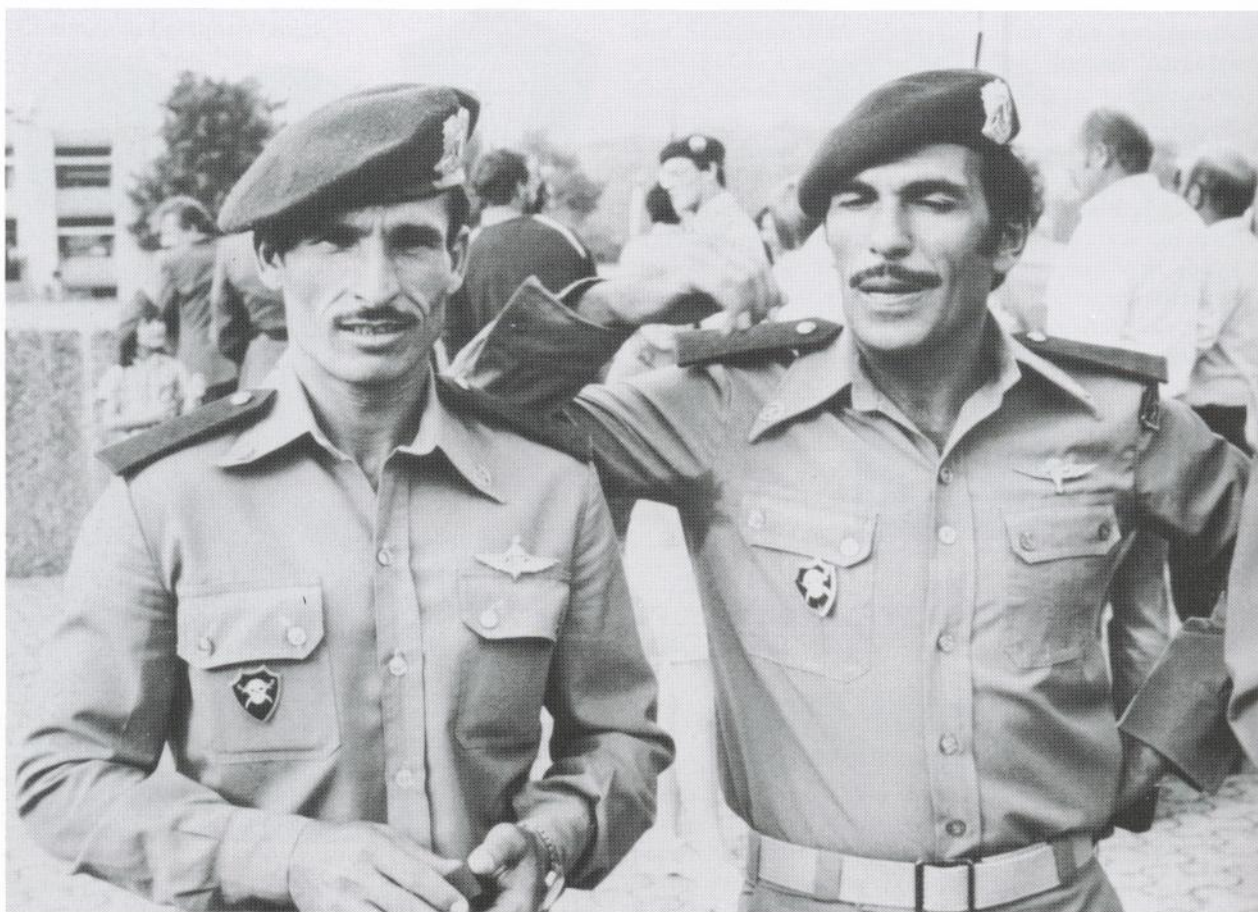
## PLATE 36 CONTINUED: LEBANON

The disintegration of the Lebanese armed forces during the civil war created instability which did not lend itself well to the creation of special operations troops; however, there have been various élite units during the past two decades. Among Christian forces, the Guardians of the Cedar were an élite. Other units formed with US Special Forces advisers have included the Tactical Strike Unit and the Moukafaha, a special ops/counter-terrorist unit.

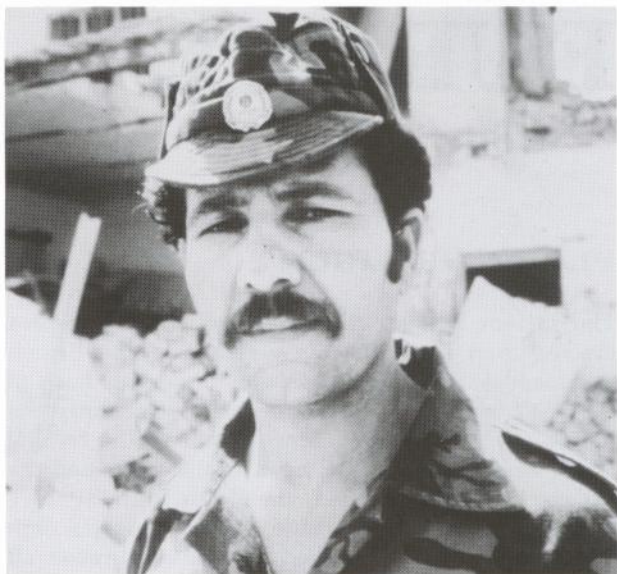
- 1 Gardiens du Cedre insignia
- 2 Obsolete Moukafaha shoulder title
- 3 Tactical Strike Force insignia (Bearing legend 'Strike Force' in Arabic)
- 4 Moukafaha insignia

▼Syrian Commandos wearing Commando pocket crests and parachute brevets of the type worn in

Syria, Egypt and Libya with only slight differences. (Adrian Bohlen)



► Iraqi Commando in camouflage utilities.



▼ Algerian paratrooper wears instructor's brevet

and airborne collar insignia. (Adrian Bohlen)



▼ Moroccan paratrooper wearing parachute instructor's brevet with

airborne collar insignia and pocket crest. (Adrian Bohlen)





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# EUROPE

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## PLATE 37: BELGIUM

The current Belgian Airborne Commando Regiment evolved from those Belgian veterans of the British Commandos, SAS, and paras who formed the basis of the post-war Belgian airborne forces. Currently the Regiment is composed of three battalions, the 1st and 3rd of which wear the red beret of the paras and the 2nd the green beret of the Commandos. Initially, there had been separate parachute and Commando regiments, but they were merged in 1954. As a result all members of the regiment received training at the Belgian Commando School at Marche-les-Dames and at the Parachute School at Schaffen. During the later

1950s, the Para Commando Regiment increased dramatically in size as battalions and independent companies were sent to help maintain control of colonies in Africa, particularly the Congo. As Belgium withdrew from Africa in 1960, some of the battalions were disbanded. Members of the unit returned to the Congo in 1964, however, to rescue European civilians during the civil war. In May 1978, the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the Para Commando Regiment were air lifted to Kolwezi, Zaire, to follow up the combat jump by the French 2nd Régiment Etrangère Parachutiste.

The current organization of the regiment includes the three airborne/Commando infantry battalions plus

- 1 Obsolete 3rd Para Battalion beret badge
- 2 UDA (Air base defence unit) beret badge
- 3 Para Regiment beret badge
- 4 1st Para Battalion beret badge
- 5 2nd Commando Battalion beret badge
- 6 Para artillery beret badge
- 7 181st Quartermaster Company (aerial delivery) beret badge; note, on Belgian beret badges normally gold indicates an officer, silver an NCO and bronze, other ranks
- 8 Para collar insignia
- 9 Commando collar insignia
- 10 Anti-tank company distinctive insignia
- 11 Plastic insignia for para/Commando combat swimmers
- 12 Metal-coloured insignia for para/Commando combat swimmers
- 13 Plastic insignia for para/Commando mountain leaders
- 14 Metal-coloured insignia for mountain leaders
- 15 Para/Commando anti-tank squadron crest
- 16 Unidentified
- 17 Airborne collar patch 1st and 3rd Para Battalions
- 18 Airborne shoulder slide 1st and 3rd Para Battalions
- 19 Obsolete 3rd Para Battalion collar insignia
- 20 Obsolete 3rd Para Battalion shoulder slide
- 21 Collar insignia for 181st Quartermaster Company (Aerial Delivery)
- 22 Shoulder loops for 181st QM Company
- 23 Commando collar patch
- 24 Commando shoulder slide
- 25 Commando shoulder arc

PLATE 37



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an HQ, parachute training school, Commando training school, anti-tank company, light armoured recon squadron, artillery battery, combat swimmer detachment and mountain leader detachment. Operating separately is the Equipes Spéciales de Reconnaissance (ESR) based at the International LRRP School in Germany and carrying out a similar mission to other NATO LRRP units.

Recruits undergo four months' training before receiving their Commando brevet, then one month's parachute training before receiving their parachute brevet. Interestingly, from 1976 women have been allowed to enlist in the regiment and some have completed both Commando and parachute training, though they were

normally assigned to administrative jobs within the regiment. Those graduating from the full para-Commando course wear the 'A' brevet, achieved after making eight jumps, three from a balloon, five from an aircraft, including one equipment and one night jump. Other Army personnel not assigned to the Para Commandos have often completed the shorter 2-week course for the 'B' brevet in which they make five jumps, four balloon and one aircraft. There is also a dispatcher/jumpmaster brevet for those who are career officers or NCOs, who hold an 'A' brevet, have served two years with an airborne unit, and have completed a 6-month instructor's course which includes free-fall training.

### PLATE 38: BELGIUM

- 26 Commando shoulder insignia
- 27 Commando Training Centre insignia
- 28 Para right sleeve insignia
- 29 Para left sleeve insignia
- 30 Combat swimmer insignia
- 31 Para/Commando Regiment blazer patch
- 32 2nd Commando Battalion blazer patch
- 33 1st Para Battalion blazer patch
- 34 3rd Para Battalion blazer patch
- 35 3rd Para Battalion sports patch

- 36 3rd Para Battalion shoulder patch
- 37 Air Commando shoulder arc
- 38 Kamina Air Base, the Congo, shoulder flash
- 39 Airborne School patch
- 40 Combat swimmer pocket patch
- 41 Anti-tank squadron blazer patch
- 42 Para/Commando Medical Centre blazer patch
- 43 Para/Commando Recce Squadron blazer patch
- 44 Para/Commando Training Centre blazer patch
- 45 USN (?) Commando blazer patch
- 46 Para/Commando artillery blazer patch
- 47 Belgian Army parachute team sport patch



◀ A typical combat scenario for the élite fighting man. This Belgian Special Forces soldier trains for the type of environment he may well have to fight in, here using the 5.56mm Minimi light machine-gun, which is well designed for operating in adverse conditions.

PLATE 38



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## GREAT BRITAIN

Within the British Army the term 'élite' has been interpreted differently at different times. For example, traditionally, the Guards Regiments have comprised an 'élite'; however, within the context of this book only the no-longer extant Guards Independent Parachute Company would qualify as élite. Among those units that will be discussed are the Royal Marine Commandos, tracing as they do their heritage to the Second World War Commandos, the first of Great Britain's special forces units. Currently the Commando Brigade consists of three 'Commandos' – Numbers 40, 42 and 45. Each of these Commandos has a strength of 680 officers and men. Support for the Commandos comes from Commando-trained Royal Marine support troops and Commando-trained members of the Army in the Commando Logistic Regiment, 29 Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery, and 59 Independent Commando Squadron, Royal Engineers. In addition to having undergone the rigorous Commando Training Course, a substantial percentage of Commandos are also parachute, ski, mountain, and scuba trained. In fact, at least 10 per cent of all Royal Marines are parachute-trained and more than 50 per cent are ski-trained. Two élite-within-an-élite specialist units are the Mountain and Arctic Warfare cadre and the Special Boat Squadron, the latter being the equivalent of the US SEALs or Marine Recons. There is also a specialist company – Comacchio Company – trained for anti-terrorist duties, protecting the North sea oil-fields. Additionally, there are approximately 1,500 Royal Marine reservists.

Within the Army are two élite units: the Special Air Service and the Parachute Regiment. The Special Air Service (SAS) consists of one regular regiment – 22nd

SAS Regiment, and two Reserve (Territorial Army) regiments – 21st and 23rd SAS. Trained to carry out deep penetration scouting and raids, anti-terrorist operations, counter-insurgency and various other special operations, the SAS Regiment is broken down into squadrons, each of about 64 men. Each squadron is further broken down into four 16-man troops, each specializing in amphibious/boat, mountain/arctic, mobility, or air-parachute skills. The selection course for the SAS is very rigorous and is designed to select those with the necessary combination of intelligence, initiative, stamina, and discipline.

The Parachute Regiment is the élite parachute light infantry formation of the British Army and is comprised of three battalions, all of which are fully parachute-trained, though prior to the Falklands War only one battalion would normally have been on jump status at a time. In 1984, however, 5th Infantry Brigade was re-designated 5th Airborne Brigade with more of the parachute infantryman on jump status as well as parachute-trained elements of the Royal Engineers, Royal Artillery, and other support and service arms assigned. Additionally, there are three reserve (TA) battalions and one reserve independent parachute company as follows: 4th Battalion drawn from the North Midlands and the north-east, 10th Battalion drawn from London, 15th Battalion drawn from Scotland, and the 16th Independent Parachute Company drawn from Lincoln.

The Royal Air Force maintains its own light infantry regiment – the RAF Regiment – for base defence, though it has also traditionally been used on counter-insurgency and other light infantry missions. No 2

### PLATE 39: BRITISH

- 1 Bright version of the Parachute Regiment cap badge adopted in 1943; until 1952 it was worn in the King's Crown version and since then in the Queen's Crown style as illustrated
- 2 'Subdued' (non-reflective) version of the Parachute Regiment cap badge
- 3 Parachute Regiment collar insignia in the same style as the regimental cap badge
- 4 & 5 Parachute Regiment buttons as worn on the No. 1 dress uniform
- 6 Parachute Regiment right shoulder insignia
- 7 Parachute Regiment left shoulder insignia
- 8 Parachute Regiment stable belt
- 9 Special Air Service wire cap badge; note the silver/gold wire; although traditionally called the 'winged dagger', this badge was initially intended to represent a winged Excalibur

- 10 Special Air Service other ranks' cap badge; note the embroidery
- 11 SAS collar insignia worn with the Nos. 1 and 2 dress uniforms
- 12 Variation of No. 11 which is slightly smaller
- 13 Special Air Service shoulder arc
- 14 Crossbelt 'Mars and Minerva' badge worn by members of 21 Special Air Service Regiment
- 15 The 'Mars and Minerva' cap badge of the Artists Rifles worn by members of 21st SAS during 1948–9, but then replaced by the standard winged dagger cap badge
- 16 Shoulder-strap rank slide in the rank of staff sergeant, but also available in other ranks and worn on the 'woolly pully' sweater
- 17 Shoulder-strap rank slide on DPM material, reportedly worn by members of 21st and 23rd SAS but possibly a 'fantasy' item created for collectors
- 18 Special Air Service stable belt

PLATE 39



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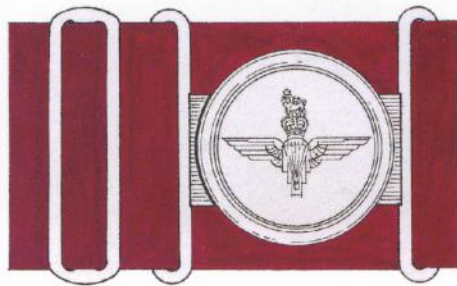
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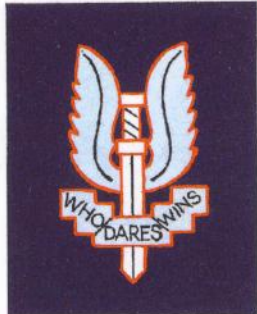
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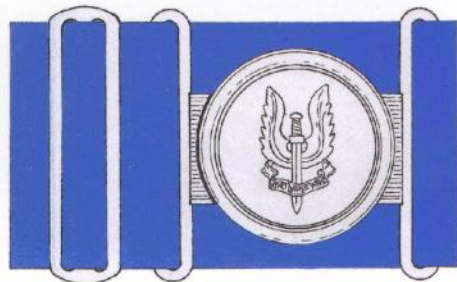
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◀◀ Member of the Special Air Service demonstrates cold weather clothing and wears the beret flash on his sand-coloured beret. (MOD)

◀ Member of the SAS in Malaya wears the beret flash on the maroon beret that was worn at that time, and the SAS wings on the shoulder. (MOD)

▼ Royal Marine engineer in the Falklands helps remove mines sown during the conflict. Note that he

wears the Royal Marines Commando shoulder arc with parachute wings. A substantial percentage of

the Royal Marines are parachute-qualified. (Imperial War Museum)

Falklands War offers a good view of the Commando beret badge. (Imperial War Museum)





► Prince Charles as Colonel in Chief of the Parachute Regiment wears the Regimental beret badge on his maroon beret. (Imperial War Museum)



Squadron of the RAF Regiment is parachute-trained and is considered the elite squadron of the RAF Regiment, capable of carrying out parachute assaults or other types of special missions.

As with many other armed forces, those of Great Britain use berets to identify elite troops. The Royal Marine Commandos wear their traditional green beret; they, in fact, established the green beret as a symbol of military elite status; while the SAS wears a sand-coloured beret, the Parachute Regiment a red beret; which gives them their title the 'Red Devils'; and the RAF Regiment a blue beret.

#### **PLATE 40: BRITISH ROYAL MARINES, CANADA, NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA**

- 19 Royal Marines bright beret/cap badge; all gilt as shown is for other ranks, while officers and Warrant Officers I have a silver globe and gilt laurels
- 20 Royal Marines subdued beret/cap badge
- 21 Royal Marines shoulder arc
- 22 Members of various regiments attend the Commando qualification course and are authorized to wear a small qualification badge bearing the traditional commando dagger signifying completion. This badge – gold on green – is for the Highland regiments
- 23 Commando qualification – gold on black – Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
- 24 As above – gold on red – line infantry
- 25 As above – gold on maroon – Parachute Regiment
- 26 As above – silver on red – Lowland Scots Regiments
- 27 As above – silver on black – Royal Tank Corps
- 28 Specialist qualification badge for a swimmer-

canoeist 3rd Class; Royal Marine qualification badges are gold on blue for ceremonial, blue and gold on green for Lovat dress

- 29 Swimmer canoeist 2nd Class
- 30 Swimmer canoeist 1st Class
- 31 An unauthorized badge made as a novelty for members of the Special Boat Squadron, with a frog with oars and the Royal Marines' red parachute wings; the disc-shaped insignia bears the SBS motto 'Not by Strength. By Guile'
- 32 Mountain leader 1st Class
- 33 Mountain leader 2nd Class
- 34 First-pattern Drop Zone flash for No. 2 Squadron, RAF Regiment
- 35 Second-pattern Drop Zone flash for No. 2 Squadron, RAF Regiment, adopted in June 1978

#### **CANADA**

Canadian airborne capability was directed against the perceived threat of Soviet airborne landings and an airborne/air transportable formation, the Mobile Striking Force, was formed based on three infantry battalions, an artillery battery and support units. In 1958, as the Soviet threat diminished the Mobile Striking Force became a single battalion known as The Defence of Canada Force.

In April 1968 airborne elements of the Canadian armed forces were concentrated into the Canadian Airborne Regiment and, with a strength of 900 troops, was a rapidly deployable force for use in Canada or abroad. Two airborne Commandos and an artillery battery provided the primary combat elements supported by airborne engineers and other troops.

The Canadian airborne forces relocated to Petawawa, Ontario in July 1977, forming the basis of the



Special Service Force, the current Canadian airborne unit. From 1979 the Airborne Regiment gained a third Commando, giving it three Commandos of 154 men each. While elements of the regiment are parachute-qualified, most of the Special Service Force is air-transportable rather than airborne. Since the US Special Forces and the Special Service Force trace their lineage to the 1st Special Service Force of the Second World War, members of the Special Service Force have traditionally attended the Special Forces selection course at Fort Bragg, and the six-week Patrol Pathfinder Course combines some elements of the US Ranger training with Pathfinder training.

1 Version of the Special Service Force formation sign worn on the service dress uniform; OSONS stands for 'Let Us Dare'

2 Version of the SSF formation sign worn on the jump smock and combat dress

3 A prototype shoulder title proposed in 1977, but which was not adopted; however, most of the titles were sold to members of the Airborne Regiment as souvenirs

## NEW ZEALAND

Despite approval for the formation of a New Zealand SAS Squadron to operate with the British 22nd SAS in Malaya in 1954, selection and training delayed availability for action to 1955. Arriving in November and December 1955, the squadron underwent parachute training at Singapore and jungle training at Perak, and after spending 24 months in Malaya, the squadron returned to New Zealand in 1957 and disbanded.

In December 1959 a single troop was re-activated and until 1965 parachute training took place in Australia, continuing thereafter at Wheupai. In 1962 a New Zealand SAS detachment was deployed to Thailand to work with US Army Special Forces and US Marines, performing reconnaissance missions and training the Thais. A second detachment was sent to fight alongside the British SAS in Borneo in 1964, followed by three others over the following two years. In November 1968 No. 4 Troop of the New Zealand SAS was sent to Vietnam, serving as part of an Australian SAS squadron and remaining in Vietnam until February 1971.

Today the New Zealand SAS group, based at Papa-kura Military Base near Auckland, follows a parachute course requiring eight jumps, including two equipment jumps and one night jump.

An interesting uniform note is that until 1986 the New Zealand SAS had maroon berets but now wear the same sand-coloured beret as the British and Australian SAS.

4 Shoulder arc worn by members of the New Zealand Special Air Service

## AUSTRALIA

The primary special forces unit in the Australian armed forces is the Australian Special Air Service Regiment, formed in July 1957. Initially independent for three years as 1st SAS Company, the unit was then incorporated into the Royal Australian Regiment. However, the Borneo Confrontation and the need for larger special forces capability led to the 1st SAS Company being expanded to two squadrons, forming the Australian Special Air Service Regiment in September 1964. After intensive training both squadrons saw service in the counter-insurgency and cross-border roles from February 1965 to August 1966.

In 1962 members of the Australian SAS became part of the Australian Army Training Team - Vietnam and the 3rd Squadron was sent to Vietnam in July 1966. Until 1971 each squadron did two tours in Vietnam, establishing a reputation for tough professionalism and as experts at long-range patrolling. Since Vietnam the Australian SAS has been active in reconnaissance, amphibious, anti-terrorist, and special operations roles.

As in all SAS units, selection and training is rigorous and the Australian SAS initial selection course includes a timed navigational exercise over rough terrain. Having passed the initial stage, the candidate undertakes a five-week familiarization course, a four-week long-range patrol course and a three-week parachute course at Nowra, New South Wales. Training continues to stress specialized skills. Completion of all training brings the sand-coloured beret bearing the SAS beret badge, although Australians wear a metal beret badge on the cloth background rather than the British cloth beret badge.

Companion to the SAS, the Royal Australian Regiment is also airborne-qualified. The three-week basic course was only twelve actual training days in 1987 during which the trainee made nine jumps. SAS members and instructors also take a free-fall course making thirty to fifty descents after three days' training. There is also a small number of trained clearance divers in the Australian Navy: No. 1 Clearance Diver Team at Perth and No. 2 Clearance Diver Team at Sydney, operating akin to US SEAL/UDT teams. Finally the 1st Commando Regiment formed in 1980 gives a greater amphibious capability; previously only reserve Commando formations with widespread Vietnam experience existed.

5 Commando beret badge



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## PLATE 41: FRANCE

France's airborne forces have a rich and proud tradition dating back to before the Second World War. It was in Indo China (where French troops made more than 100 combat jumps) and Algeria that the para legend was forged. To understand French parachute units, one must appreciate the difference between the Colonial Paratroops (now the RPIMa), the Metro Paratroops, and the Legion Paratroops. The old Colonial Paratroops, who are now known as the Marine Paratroops (not because of any amphibious mission but because they are deployed on foreign service), were and are professionals who join with the understanding that they may be deployed outside France. The Metro paras were and are those who would normally only be deployed abroad in the event of full-scale hostilities. The Foreign Legion paras are professionals who may be deployed anywhere France deems necessary and who act as the principal rapid deployment element.

The principal French airborne unit today is the 11th Division Parachutiste based at Tarbes. Principal operational units within the 11th DP are seven parachute battalions: the 1st RPIMa, 3rd RPIMa, 6th RPIMa, and 8th RPIMa, 1st RCP (Régiment Chasseurs Parachutistes), 9th RCP, and 2nd REP (Régiment Etrangère Parachutiste). Artillery, engineer, signals, transport, logistical, and aviation units are also assigned. Independent of the 11th DP are the 2nd RPIMa and the 13th RDP (Régiment Dragons Parachutistes). Note that this latter unit functions as a long-range patrol, deep penetration raiding unit. The most recent French combat jump was in 1978 at Kolwezi, Zaire, where the 2nd REP jumped to rescue civilians under attack by rebels.

Prior to the creation of the 11th DP, there was a 25th Parachute Division, created in Algeria in 1956 and disbanded in 1961 after the putsch.

Among other units receiving parachute training are

the Squadron Fusiliers Commandos Intervention of the Air Force; numerous members of the Marine Commandos, Naval Combat Swimmers, and members of the Gendarmarie Parachute unit as well as members of GIGN, the national counter-terrorist unit.

Legion paras wear a green beret; others wear the red beret – the famous beret 'rouge'. Air Force Commandos wear a black beret and Marine Commandos wear a green beret.

- 1 From 1946 to 1958 the Metro para beret badge; now the Legion para beret badge
- 2 First-type Colonial para beret badge, then the RPIMa beret badge
- 3 From 1962 to 1974 RPIMa beret badge
- 4 25th Brigade Aéroportée crest
- 5 1st Brigade Parachutiste crest
- 6 2nd Brigade Parachutiste crest
- 7 Etat-Major, 11th Division Parachutiste
- 8 11th DP/44th Division Militaire
- 9 Second type of No. 8
- 10 Etat-Major du Groupement Aéroportée
- 11 Détachement Barracuda
- 12 Variant of No. 1
- 13 French assistance elements Operation 'Bouar'
- 14 Crest for later designation for 'Barracuda' in the Central African Republic – Eléments Français d'Assistance d'Opérations
- 15 1st Régiment Chasseurs Parachutistes
- 16 Another version of the 1st RCP crest locally made in Indo-China
- 17 14th RCP
- 18 18th RCP
- 19 9th RCP
- 20 3rd Company of the 1st RCP
- 21 Compagnie d'Appui, 1st RCP
- 22 2nd Company of the 1st RCP
- 23 Compagnie d'Eclairage et d'Appui du 9th RCP

PLATE 41



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## PLATE 42: FRANCE

- 24 11th Company of the 9th RCP
- 25 3rd Company of the RCP (apparently struck for a reunion)
- 26 Compagnie du Commandement et de Soutien du 9th RCP
- 27 1st Company of the 9th RCP
- 28 12th Company of the 9th RCP
- 29 Compagnie de Base du 9th RCP
- 30 2nd Compagnie du 9th RCP
- 31 SER of the 9th RCP
- 32 1st Company of the 1st RCP
- 33 4th Company of the 1st RCP
- 34 Groupement d'Instruction du 9th RCP
- 35 3rd Company of the 9th RCP
- 36 Détachement d'Assistance Operationelle du 1st RCP

- 37 12th Company of the 1st RCP
- 38 Variant of 37
- 39 Musicians of the 11th DP
- 40 Compagnie de Commandement et de Soutien du 1st RCP
- 41 3rd RCP
- 42 4th Company of the 9th RCP
- 43 Section Milan of the 9th RCP
- 44 11th Bataillon Parachutiste de Choc (shock or assault parachute battalion)
- 45 12th Bataillon Parachutiste de Choc
- 46 1st Bataillon Parachutiste de Choc

▼ Members of France's elite counter-terrorist unit GIGN; note the shoulder

sleeve insignia and the parachute brevet. (ECP)



PLATE 42



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## PLATE 43: LEGION PARATROOP INSIGNIA

- 1 Parachute Company of the 3rd REI Pocket Crest (note this was the original Legion para unit)
- 2 1st Foreign Legion Para Battalion
- 3 1st Foreign Legion Para Regiment (the famous 1st REP disbanded in Algeria after the attempted putsch)
- 4 2nd Foreign Legion Para Battalion, later Regiment
- 5 Compagnie Etrangère de Revitaillement par Air (one of the rarest and most sought after of all French insignia, sometimes fetching prices in excess of \$2,000)
- 6 3rd Foreign Legion Para Regiment
- 7 1st Foreign Legion Para Heavy Mortar Company
- 8 3rd Company, 2nd REP
- 9 2nd Company, 2nd REP (first type)
- 10 4th Company, 2nd REP
- 11 2nd Company, 2nd REP (second type)

### 12 1st Company, 2nd REP

Note: Items 13–17 were produced in the USA and were never officially adopted by the 2nd REP though they may have been worn by some unit members unofficially

13 Amphibious Company of the 2nd REP (each of the four parachute infantry companies has a speciality; the 3rd Cie is amphibious/small boat)

14 2nd Company, 2nd REP (mountain/ski specialists)

15 Recon and Tactical Support Company, 2nd REP (includes LRRP and HALO personnel)

16 Administrative and Logistical Support Company, 2nd REP

17 HALO teams (free-fall parachutists), 2nd REP

▼ Members of the 2nd French Foreign Legion Parachute Regiment offer a good view of the legion

parachute beret badge. Note also the tailored uniforms so common in the Legion.





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## PLATE 44: COLONIAL PARAS AND RPIMA

1 2nd RPC (Régiment Colonial Parachutiste)/RPIMa: note the SAS wing harking back to the Second World War French SAS

2 3rd RPIMa

3 6th RPIMa

4 7th RPIMa

5 8th RPIMa

6 Compagnie Parachutiste d'Infanterie de Marine

7 5th Battalion RPIMa

8 8th RPIMa (Type 2)

9 1st RPIMa

10 1st Régiment Inter-Armes d'Outre-Mer

11 Section Entac du 8th RPIMa

12 Section d'Eclairage Régimentaire du 8th RPIMa

13 Section de Saut Operationnelle Grande Hauteur du 8th RPIMa

14 3rd RPIMa in Chad

15 Milan Section 6th RPIMa

16 Compagnie d'Eclairage et d'Appui 8th RPIMa

17 Section de Saut Operationnelle Grande Hauteur du 3rd RPIMa

18 1st RPIMa musicians

19 11th Company, 6th RPIMa

20 Transmissions, 6th RPIMa

21 3rd Company, 6th RPIMa

22 3rd Company, 6th RPIMa

▼Members of France's GIGN wear the parachute brevet on the right breast, while the man on the left

wears the Commando brevet on the left breast. (ECP)





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## PLATE 45: FRANCE

- 1 1st Régiment de Hussards Parachutistes
- 2 13th Régiment de Dragons Parachutistes
- 3 Peloton Kieger (Type I)
- 4 Anti-tank Platoon, 1st Squadron, 1st RHP (Type I)
- 5 4th Recon Platoon, 3rd Squadron, 1st RHP
- 6 Anti-tank Platoon, 4th Squadron, 1st RHP
- 7 HQ & Service Squadron, 1st RHP
- 8 Variant of No. 7
- 9 Peloton Kieger (Type II)
- 10 1st Squadron, 1st RHP Chad
- 11 Section de la Fanfare, 1st RHP
- 12 Anti-tank platoon, 10th RH
- 13 1st Squadron, 1st RHP in the Central African Republic
- 14 Peloton Kieger in the Ivory Coast
- 15-23 Note these items are American-made and in most cases havenot been officially adopted though they may have been considered and even worn within the units
- 15 Anti-tank Platoon, 1st Squadron, 1st RHP
- 16 4th Platoon, 4th Squadron, 1st RHP
- 17 1st Platoon, 4th Squadron, 1st RHP
- 18 2nd Anti-tank Platoon, 3rd Squadron, 1st RHP
- 19 Anti-tank Platoon, 1st Squadron, 1st RHP
- 20 2nd Platoon, 2nd Squadron, 1st RHP
- 21 1st Platoon, 4th Squadron, 1st RHP
- 22 Anti-tank Platoon, 4th Squadron, 1st RHP
- 23 35th Parachute Artillery Regiment



◀ A fine detailed study of a paratrooper of the 3rd RPIMa (Régiment Parachutiste d'Infanterie de Marine) in New Caledonia, 1985.

PLATE 45



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## PLATE 46: FRANCE

- 24 20th Parachute Artillery Group
- 25 3rd Battery, 35th Parachute Artillery Regiment
- 25 3rd Battery, 35th Parachute Artillery Regiment
- 26 Training Battery, 35th Parachute Artillery Regiment
- 27 20mm AA, 35th Parachute Artillery Regiment
- 28 1st Battery, 35th Parachute Artillery Regiment
- 29 Aviation Platoon, 10th Parachute Division
- 30 Variant of No. 29
- 31 Mixed Aviation Platoon, 25th Parachute Division
- 32 Mixed Aviation Platoon, 11th Division
- 33 Etablissement de Réserve Générale du Matériel Alat et Aéroportée

- 34 5th Combat Helicopter Regiment
- 35 5th Groupement de Soutien de l'Alat
- 36 5th Combat Helicopter Regiment (Type II)
- 37 17th Airborne Engineer Battalion
- 38 17th Airborne Engineer Battalion (Tpe II)
- 39 60th Airborne Engineer Company
- 40 75th (later 61st) Airborne Engineer Company
- 41 Engineer Group Chad, 17th Airborne Engineer Regiment
- 42 1st Company, 17th Parachute Engineer Regiment
- 43 60th Parachute Signals Company
- 44 61st Airborne Signals Battalion
- 45 61st Command and Signals Battalion
- 46 425th Compagnie Légère Transmissions (Signals)
- 47 1st Parachute Signals Company



◀ *France places great emphasis on maintaining sniper capability its special forces. This one is training with the FR-F1 rifle at Nîmes in 1990.*

PLATE 46



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## PLATE 47: FRANCE

- 48 Transport Group 513
- 49 75th HQ Company, Parachute Intervention Group
- 50 60th HQ Company, Parachute Intervention Group
- 51 Centre d'Instruction du Train 155
- 52 507th Transport Group
- 53 513th Transport Group
- 54 507th Transport Group (Type II)
- 55 61st HQ Company, 11th Division Légère d'Intervention
- 56 CIT 155 (Type II)

- 57 61st HQ Company, 11th Division
- 58 Groupe d'Escadron du Train 513
- 59 61st HQ Squadron, 11th Division
- 60 61st HQ Squadron, 11th Parachute Division
- 61 425th Transport and Traffic Squadron
- 62 1st Transport and Traffic Squadron, 1st BPCS
- 63 1st Air Delivery Company
- 64 2nd Air Delivery Company
- 65 3rd Air Delivery Company
- 66 4th Air Delivery Company, Troupes de Marine
- 67 Air Drop Squadron, 1st Air Delivery Company
- 68 Air Delivery Regiment



◀ French parachute officer wears the jaunty French parachute beret with the winged sword beret badge. (ECP)



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## PLATE 48: FRANCE

- 69 61st Service Battalion
- 70 425th HQ Company (Type I)
- 71 425th HQ Company (Type II)
- 72 420th HQ Company
- 73 420th Command and Support Battalion
- 74 425th Command and Support Battalion
- 75 420th Parachute Command and Support Battalion
- 76 425th Parachute Command and Support Battalion
- 77 1st Parachute Command and Support Battalion
- 78 425th HQ and Command Company
- 79 1st HQ and Command Company
- 80 Training Group, 1st Command and Support Battalion
- 81 60th Divisional Repair Company
- 82 75th Divisional Repair Company
- 83 191st Medium Parachute Repair Company
- 84 61st Divisional Repair Company
- 85 425th Compagnie Légère de Réparation du Matériel
- 86 441st Compagnie du Matériel de Territoire
- 87 425th Groupement Légère de Réparation du Matériel
- 88 1st Groupement Légère de Réparation du Matériel
- 89 Quartermaster, 25th Parachute Division



◀ *A paratrooper of the 2nd REP, camouflaged and ready to jump while training in Corsica.*



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## PLATE 49: FRANCE

- 90 Quartermaster, 11th Division
- 91 Quartermaster, 11th Parachute Division
- 92 14th Quartermaster Group
- 93 5th Military Nurse Section
- 94 75th Airborne Medical Company
- 95 405th Parachute Medical Company
- 96 61st Medical Company
- 97 Centre d'Instruction du Service de Santé de l'ETAP
- 98 Variant of No. 97
- 99 14th Antenne Chirurgicale Parachutiste (Type I)

- 100 14th Antenne Chirurgicale Parachutiste (Type II)
- 101 1st Antenne Chirurgicale Parachutiste
- 102 14th Antenne Médicale Parachutiste
- 103 Airborne Training School
- 104 Airborne Training School Base
- 105 Groupement d'Instruction de la Brigade Parachutiste d'Outre-Mer
- 106 11th Division Mountain Training Centre
- 107 Airborne Base North Africa
- 108 Mobile Airborne Operating Base
- 109 Escadron de Livraison Mobile Airborne Operating Base



▲ Legionnaires of the DLEM – the *Détachement de Légion Etrangère* – at Mayotte, well armed and

*spread out while training on an island in the Indian Ocean.*



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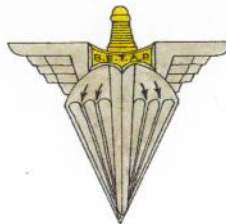
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## PLATE 50: FRANCE IN LEBANON

Note, most of the commemorative badges made for French airborne forces in Lebanon were in two versions – French-manufactured and locally-manufactured, the latter being much rougher in finish.

- 1 Beret insignia
- 2 Variant of No. 1
- 3 3rd RPIMa
- 4 Variant of No. 3
- 5 Signals, 3rd RPIMa
- 6 1st Company, 17th RGAP (Type I)
- 7 BOMAP (Type I)
- 8 Movement Control (Type I)
- 9 SMR 1
- 10 420th DSL
- 11 Combat Support Company, 420th DSL, 13th Mordat
- 12 420th Détachement de Soutien Logistique (DSL)
- 13 Military Police in Lebanon (Type I)
- 14 Régiment Français de l'Onu
- 15 Signals Section, 8th RPIMa
- 16 8th RPIMa (Type I)
- 17 3rd Company, 17th Parachute Engineer Regiment (Type I)
- 18 Transport Squadron, 420th DSL
- 19 1st Squadron, 1st RHP
- 20 Support Platoon, 1st RHP
- 21 Provisions Platoon, 420th DSL
- 22 Transport, 420th DSL
- 23 Movement Control (Type II)
- 24 Mobile Airborne Operating Base (BOMAP) (Type II)



▲ A section of the 2ème REP in duty in Chad 1989.

PLATE 50



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## PLATE 51: FRANCE IN LEBANON

- 25 Détachement Santé du 420th DSL
- 26 420th Materials Company
- 27 Section d'Intervention du 425th DSL
- 28 Movement Control (Type III)
- 29 2nd Company, 17th Parachute Engineer Regiment
- 30 French Log – MP
- 31 425th DSL
- 32 3rd Company, 17th Parachute Engineer Regiment (Type II)
- 33 Compagnie d'Eclairage et d'Appui, 9th RCP
- 34 MP Company
- 35 Compagnie de Commandement, d'Organisation et des Services du 420th DSL (Type I)
- 36 2nd Company, 17th Parachute Engineer Regiment (Type II)
- 37 14th Parachute Command and Support Regiment
- 38 1st Company, 6th RPIMa
- 39 Section d'Intervention, 3rd Company, 1st RCP
- 40 1st RCP
- 41 9th RCP
- 42 French Log Battalion
- 43 Movement Company (Type IV)
- 44 2nd Company, 9th RCP
- 45 3rd Company, 6th RPIMa
- 46 Movement Control (Type V)
- 47 Compagnie d'Eclairage et d'Appui du 6th RPIMa



◀ *In parade dress, this is a legionnaire of the DLEM, the Détachement de légion Etrangère, at Mayotte.*

PLATE 51



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## PLATE 52: FRANCE IN LEBANON

- 48 1st Company, 17th Parachute Engineer Regiment
- 49 Procurement Company, 420th DSL
- 50 Prévoté au Liban (Type II)
- 51 Section d'Intervention, 1st RCP
- 52 11th Company, 6th RPIMa
- 53 4th Squadron, 1st RHP
- 54 Support Company, 17th Parachute Engineer Regiment
- 55 1st Company, 9th RCP
- 56 3rd Company, 17th Parachute Engineer Regiment
- 57 Movement Control (Type VI)
- 58 Compagnie de Commandement d'Organisation et de Soutien du 420th DSL (Type II)

- 59 Movement Control (Type VII)
- 60 Section d'Intervention, 1st RHP
- 61 Compagnie de Commandement d'Organisation et de Soutien du 420th DSL (Type III)
- 62 8th RPIMa
- 63 2nd Company, 17th Parachute Engineer Regiment (Type III)
- 64 420th DSL (Type II)
- 65 Force Multinationale d'Interposition Beyrauth
- 66 1st Company, 17th RGP/FMS
- 67 3rd RPIMa
- 68 8th RPIMa
- 69 1st RHP
- 70 17th RGP



◀ *Typical of the conditions in which today's elite units must fight: this French soldier with full pack, and his rifle at the ready, is fording a river. (Courtesy of Ian V. Hogg)*

PLATE 52



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## WEST GERMANY

Germany had been one of the pioneers of airborne troops during the years prior to the Second World War, and in 1956 as part of the re-establishment of the Federal Republic's armed forces, the 1st Airborne Division was established and organized along the lines of a US airborne division of the time. Thus, three brigades, each attached to one of the three German corps commands are: 25 Brigade at Schwarzwald, 26 Brigade at Saarlouis, and 27 Brigade at Lippstadt. Each brigade is comprised of four battalions, three regular and one reserve. Within each battalion are a staff and supply company, two airborne infantry companies and two airborne anti-tank companies. Each brigade also has five independent companies: HQ, medical, supply, mortar, and engineer. A total of 2,808 men make up a Fallschirmjäger brigade. Although as this is written re-unification of Germany and possible pullout from NATO seems possible, the 1st Airborne Division currently still provides the primary German contingent for NATO's Allied Mobile Force (AMF). The 1st Airborne Division receives extensive air mobile as well as airborne training, and in response to the likelihood of having to face massive Soviet tank thrusts, the Fallschirmjäger receive intensive anti-tank training.

Airborne training for members of the division and other para-qualified German personnel is carried out at the Airborne School at Altenstadt. Advanced training is carried out at the Airborne Training Centre at Schongau for career airborne troops. Advanced air-

borne tactics. Halo training, and Ranger (Einzelkämpfer) training are given at Schongau.

Einzelkämpfer (roughly equivalent to US Rangers) training last four weeks and ten courses per year are run. All platoon leaders in the infantry, airborne, mountain and LRRP units must pass this course. Hence leadership as well as unarmed combat, obstacle crossing, mobility and survival are stressed.

Another extremely élite unit within the West German Army is the 1st Mountain Division, also established in 1956. Normal deployment for the division is: division HQ at Garmisch-Partenkirchen, 22nd Armoured Infantry Brigade at Murnau, 23rd Mountain Rifle Brigade at Bad Reichenhall, 24th Armoured Brigade at Landshut, and 56th Home Defence Brigade at Neuburg. The armoured/mechanized units are deployed in the lower Alps and the mountain infantry units in the high Alps. The mountain brigade has four mountain infantry battalions and one mountain artillery battalion, all trained for ski/high mountain operations. Other divisional troops include: a mountain artillery regiment, mountain communications battalion, mountain armoured recon battalion, mountain tank battalion, two separate mountain battalions, a security protection battalion, mountain aid defence battalion, mountain engineer regiment, mountain aviation squadron, mountain maintenance/repair battalion, mountain supply/support battalion, and a mountain medical services battalion. In all the 1st Mountain Division fields about 20,000 men. Virtually

## PLATE 53: WEST GERMANY

1 Metal airborne beret badge minus national flag (obsolete)

2 Cloth airborne beret badge

3 Metal Fernspah beret badge

4 Cloth Fernspah beret badge

5 Mountain Guide qualification badge; made in bullion on grey, silk on grey, and silk on fatigue

6 Einzelkämpfer badge; in cloth silver on fatigue for the Army and Luftwaffe, gold on fatigue for the Navy, and subdued for US personnel; in bullion, silver on grey for the Army; silver on blue grey for the Luftwaffe, and gold on blue or gold on white for the Navy

7, 8, 9 1st Airborne Division; borders indicate brigades

10, 11 New International LRRP School patches

12 Patch 3rd Company, 252 Airborne B, 25th Airborne Bde

13 Patch 2nd Company, 252 Airborne Bn, 25th Airborne Bde

14 Patch 3rd Company, 252 Airborne Bn, 25th Airborne Bde

15 Patch Airborne anti-tank company, 250th Airborne Bn, 25th Airborne Bde

16 Patch for Airborne Training Company 260

17 Patch 1st Company, 261st Airborne Bn, 26th Airborne Bde

18 Patch 3rd Company, 261st Airborne Bn, 26th Airborne Bde

19 Patch 4th Company, 261st Airborne Bn, 26th Airborne Bde

20 Patch 2nd Company, 262nd Airborne Bn, 26th Aviation Bde

21 Patch 271st Company, 27th Airborne Bde

22 Sport parachute club, 1st Airborne Division

23 Patch Airborne Signal Instructional, Bn 19



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every member of the division receives basic ski and mountaineering training, while experienced alpinists are concentrated in the high mountain units. They receive highly specialized training at the high mountain school at Mittenwald.

Sometimes confused with the regular troops of the alpine units are the Mountain Guides who advise commanders on all aspects of mountain warfare and who provide the training cadre for the 1st Mountain Division. Once selected for Mountain Guide training, soldiers undergo a rigorous 32-week training regimen which produces some of the finest mountain-ski troops in the world.

Yet another highly elite unit within the West German Army is the Fernspah (what in the US Army would be called LRRPs). Each of the corps in the Bundeswehr has its own Fernspah company to gather close-range Intelligence on enemy units identification, weapons and equipment, HQ sites, airfields, supply dumps, etc. These companies are numbered 100 for 1st Corps, 200 for 2nd Corps, and 300 for 3rd Corps. Primarily recruited from the airborne and mountain

divisions, the Fernspah must still undergo specialized training in communications, land navigation, map reading, close combat, survival, escape and evasion, camouflage, infiltration and exfiltration, photography, Intelligence-gathering, and other such skills. Training takes place at the International Long Range Patrol School at Weingarten where No. 1 Wing conducts the famed international course for allied personnel, while No. 2 Wing trains West German Fernspah. Operationally, the Fernspahtrupp consisting of four men is the basic element.

Within the West German Navy are that country's underwater elite – the Kampfschwimmers. The combat swimmer company has such missions as reconnaissance of harbours, Intelligence-gathering, underwater sabotage, beach clearance, and raids from the sea or rivers. Combat swimmers are trained for insertion via parachute, small boat, or SCUBA.

Two distinctive berets are worn within the West German Army – maroon by the airborne troops and Fernspaher and green by the Einzelkämpfers.

## PLATE 54: WEST GERMANY

- 24 Patch 2nd Company, 261st Airborne Bn, 26th Airborne Bde
- 25 Unidentified
- 26 International LRRP School patch
- 27 Fernspah Parachutist Sport patch
- 28 LRRP Company 100 sport patch
- 29 LRRP Training Centre
- 30 LRRP Company 100
- 31 LRRP Company 200
- 32 LRRP Company 300
- 33 Combat Swimmer pocket patch
- 34 Another combat swimmer patch
- 35 HQ 25th Airborne Bde, pocket crest; note that to save space the following pocket crests would be on a similar hanger
- 36 Airborne Bn 251, 25th Airborne Bde pocket crest
- 37 Airborne Bn 252, 25th Airborne Bde pocket crest
- 38 Airborne Bn 253, 25th Airborne Bde pocket crest
- 39 Airborne Eng Company 250 (Type II), pocket crest
- 40 Avn Eng Company 250 (Type I), pocket crest
- 41 Airborne Mortar Company 250, pocket crest
- 42 Airborne Medical Company 250, pocket crest
- 43 Airborne Supply Company 250, pocket crest
- 44 Airborne Brigade 26, pocket crest
- 45 Airborne Bn 261, 26th Airborne Bde, pocket crest

► *These Germans have G3 rifles and a Lanze anti-tank weapon, making them a potent striking force.*  
(Courtesy of Ian V. Hogg)





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## PLATE 55: WEST GERMANY

- 46 Airborne Bn 263, 26th Airborne Bde, pocket crest
- 47 Airborne Engineer Company 260, 26th Airborne Bde, pocket crest
- 48 Airborne Mortar Company 260, 26th Airborne Bde, pocket crest
- 49 Airborne Medical Company 260, 26th Airborne Bde, pocket crest
- 50 Airborne Supply Company 260, 26th Airborne Bde, pocket crest
- 51 Airborne Bn 262, 26th Airborne Bde, pocket crest; also worn by Airborne Signal Company 9
- 52 Airborne Anti-Tank Company 260, 26th Airborne Bde, pocket crest
- 53 27th Airborne Brigade, pocket crest
- 54 Airborne Bn 271, 27th Airborne Bde
- 55 Airborne Bn 272, 27th Airborne Bde
- 56 Airborne Bn 273, 27th Airborne Bde
- 57 Airborne Battalion 274, 27th Airborne Brigade
- 58 Airborne Engineer Company 270
- 59 Airborne Medical Company 270
- 60 Airborne Supply Company 270
- 61 Airborne Company 909, the instructional and test company at the Airborne School, pocket crest
- 62 Airborne School, pocket crest
- 63 International LRRP School
- 64 LRRP Company 100
- 65 LRRP Company 300
- 66 Mountain Artillery Company 81 (this unit is no longer airborne but is included since it retains the parachute on its crest)
- 67 12th Engineer Battalion (no longer airborne but retains parachute on crest)
- 68 Signal Training Company 3/11 (not airborne but included because of parachute on crest)



◀ A good illustration of the extremes of terrain and temperature in which all special forces must be able to operate. These are German special mountain troops on a training exercise. (Courtesy of Ian V. Hogg)



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## ITALY

Italy was a pioneer in the development of both airborne and scuba troops prior to and during the Second World War. This heritage has helped maintain Italian airborne and special operations units at a high standard. Italy's first post-war Army airborne unit was a parachute battalion formed in 1948. Throughout the 1950s other parachute units were formed including a parachute platoon within the Alpine Brigade, a Carabinieri Parachute Battalion, a Parachute Saboteur Battalion and a Parachute Artillery Battery. Drawing on these and other units, the 1st Parachute Regiment was formed in 1962, then expanded to brigade status the next year, though it did not receive its current designation as the Folgore Brigade until 1967. Within the Folgore Brigade are the following units: 1st Carabinieri Parachute Battalion 'Tuscania', 2nd Parachute Battalion 'Tarquinia', 3rd Parachute Battalion 'Poggio Rusco', 5th Parachute Battalion 'El Alamein', 9th Para Saboteur Battalion 'Col. Moschin', 185th Parachute Artillery Group 'Viterbo', 4th Alpine Parachute Company, and the Parachute School at Pisa. Other airborne-qualified units within the Army include parachute platoons assigned to each of the five alpine brigades, themselves elite mountaineering and ski units. The Saboteur Battalion normally operates in the Long Range Recon Patrol or raiding mission. The Carabinieri are the militarized national police, and in addition to providing military police support for the Folgore Brigade the airborne members of the Carabinieri can be used for other specialized missions. Members of GIS, the Carabinieri anti-terrorist unit,

are often drawn from the parachute battalion. As previously mentioned, the Alpini are another highly trained group within the Army. Each of the five Alpine brigades: Taurinese, Orobica, Tridentina, Cadore, and Julia, consists of an Alpine infantry regiment of 3-4 battalions, an Alpine engineer company, an aviation unit, a parachute platoon, an armoured infantry company with APCs, and an Alpine artillery regiment.

Often considered the most elite troops within the Italian armed forces are their 'incursori', the parachute frogmen. Known as COMSUBIN (Commando Raggruppamento Subacqui ed Incursori), the 200 men of the Incursori are headquartered just outside La Spezia. In addition to its normal combat swimmer tasks, CONSUBIN also handles Italian anti-terrorist duties for ship hijackings or other operations involving their special skills. Many members of CONSUBIN are drawn from the Italian Marines, the San Marco Battalion. This 1,000-man battalion is divided into an operations group of four companies, a logistics group, and a training group. Primarily specialists in amphibious operations, a large number of San Marco Marines are also parachute-trained.

One final unit that is airborne-trained is the Target Acquisitions Group for the 3rd Missile Brigade. This group trains extensively with American contingents to NATO and wears American as well as Italian parachute wings.

The members of the Folgore Brigade wear the traditional airborne maroon beret; the members of the San Marco Marines wear a black beret.

### PLATE 56: ITALIAN AIRBORNE

- 1 Beret badge worn by airborne personnel not assigned to a unit with a numbered beret badge
- 2 Variant beret badge for members of the Folgore Brigade not assigned to a numbered unit
- 3 Beret badge for members of the Folgore Brigade assigned to a numbered unit; in this case the 9th Incursori Battalion
- 4 Alpini cap badge worn on the Alpini hat, but the small parachute denotes those Alpini who are on parachute status
- 5 Another, subdued, version of the Alpini hat badge
- 6 Other ranks' para beret badge worn until about 1963
- 7 Variant of the officers' para beret badge worn until about 1963
- 8 Officers' para beret badge worn until about 1963
- 9 Other ranks' subdued plastic para beret badge similar to

- 10 Beret badge worn by personnel assigned to the Italian Parachute School
- 11 Officers' subdued para beret badge similar to 8
- 12 Beret badge worn by the airborne target acquisition unit, 26th Gruppo Squadroni ALE
- 13 Distinctive insignia worn by airborne engineers from 1963 to 1975
- 14 Although sometimes identified as a variant of 13, this badge is most likely for an Air Force parachute unit known as 'Azzuro' from the 1940s
- 15 Collar badge worn by all members of the Folgore Brigade not assigned to a specialist unit
- 16 Collar badge worn by airborne artillery
- 17 Collar badge worn by airborne engineers
- 18 Collar badge worn by airborne signals
- 19 Collar badge worn by airborne medical
- 20 Collar badge worn by airborne equipment supply
- 21 Collar badge worn by airborne food supply
- 22 Collar badge worn by airborne administrative



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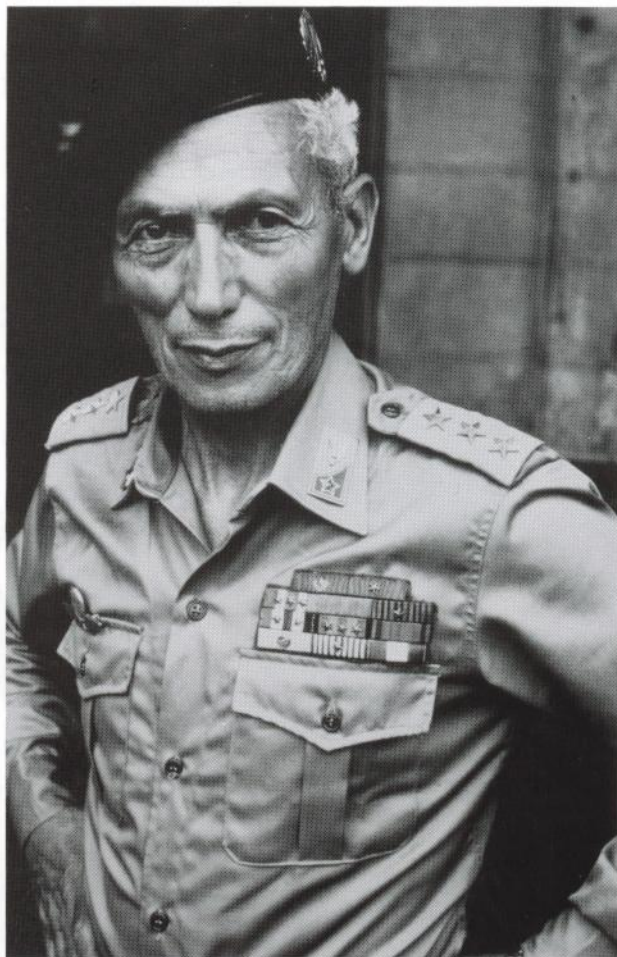
## PLATE 57: ITALIAN AIRBORNE

- 23** Metal collar insignia worn by all ranks from 1946 to 1963
- 24** Collar insignia of the 1st Carabinieri Battalion 'Tuscania'
- 25** Bullion para collar insignia
- 26** Old-style Folgore Brigade bullion collar insignia
- 27** Other ranks' airborne collar insignia 1946-1963
- 28** Collar badge worn by non-parachute-qualified personnel of the Folgore Brigade (note lack of parachute on insignia)
- 29** Silk bevo parachutists' collar insignia
- 30** Air Force parachutists' collar insignia
- 31** Bullion version of No. 30
- 32** Obsolete distinctive insignia (DI) for the 1st Parachute Regiment
- 33** First-type DI for 1st Carabinieri Parachute Battalion 'Tuscania'
- 34** Second-type DI for 1st Carabinieri Parachute Battalion 'Tuscania'
- 35** First-type DI for 2nd Parachute Battalion 'Tarquinia'
- 36** Second-type DI for 2nd Parachute Battalion 'Tarquinia'
- 37** Obsolete 2nd Parachute Battalion DI
- 38** 3rd Parachute Battalion 'Poggio Rusco' DI
- 39** First-type DI for 5th Parachute Battalion 'El Alamein'
- 40** Second-type DI for 5th Parachute Battalion 'El Alamein'
- 41** DI for 9th Parachute Battalion 'Col. Moschin'; INC stands for 'Incursori' designating this as a special assault/long-range patrol battalion. The yellow backing indicates six years of service, and the DI is mounted on a pocket hanger when wearing it on the uniform. Nos. 366-369 are also on their hangers. For winter the hangers are dark brown or black and for summer tan
- 42** The same as No. 41 but without the years of service backing
- 43** Similar to the badge in 40 and 41, but marked SAB for 'Sabatore'; the red backing indicates ten

years of service with the battalion. Blue would indicate eight years of service

**44** DI for Parachute Signals Company, Folgore Brigade

**45** DI for Parachute Maintenance Company, Folgore Brigade; 'Ripiegatore' means 'rigger'



▲An Italian airborne colonel wears parachute wings, airborne collar

insignia and beret badge. (Adrian Bohlen)

PLATE 57



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## PLATE 58: ITALIAN AIRBORNE AND INCURSORI

- 46 DI for Parachute Platoon, Alpini Brigade 'Tridentina'
- 47 DI for Parachute Platoon, Alpini Brigade 'Cadore'
- 48 DI for Parachute Platoon, Alpini Brigade 'Orobica'
- 49 DI for Parachute Platoon, Alpini Brigade 'Taurinense'
- 50 DI for Parachute Company, Alpini IV C.d'A
- 51 DI for Parachute Aerial Resupply Company, Folgore Brigade
- 52 DI for HQ, Folgore Brigade
- 53 DI for 185th Parachute Field Artillery Group 'Viterbo', Folgore Brigade
- 54 DI for Parachute Logistics Battalion, Folgore Brigade
- 55 DI for Parachute Anti-Tank Company, Folgore Brigade
- 56 DI for Parachute Engineer Company, Folgore Brigade
- 57 DI for Parachute Command and Service Company, Folgore Brigade (second type)
- 58 DI for Airborne Medical Company, Folgore Brigade
- 59 DI for Parachute Maintenance Company, Carabinieri Parachute Battalion
- 60 DI for Parachute Reconnaissance Company, Folgore Brigade
- 61 DI for Parachute Long Range Patrol Battalion 'Sabatatore' (first type)
- 62 DI for Battalion 'Sabatatore' (second type)
- 63 DI for Military Parachute School cadre
- 64 Parachute Instructor's qualification badge
- 65 Second World War RSI Airborne insignia, included because it is often mistaken for current distinctive insignia
- 1 Incursori qualification badge for petty officers 1st and 2nd class to be worn on the shoulder boards on the summer uniform and on the sleeve in winter uniform

- 2 Variation on Incursori qualification for petty officers 1st and 2nd class
- 3 Incursori qualification badge for chief petty officers and officers to be worn over the ribbons on the left pocket
- 4 Variation of the Incursori qualification badge for CPOs and officers
- 5 Army Commando qualification badge
- 6 Variation of No. 5



▲Italian airborne NCO of the Parachute Signals Company (note the crest on the left pocket). (Adrian Bohlen)



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## PLATE 59: ITALIAN MARINES AND AIRBORNE

- 1 COMSUBIN Frogman/Para-Frogman other ranks' qualification badge
- 2 CONSUBIN officer qualification badge
- 3 San Marco Marine DI
- 4 San Marco Marine collar insignia
- 5 San Marco Marine beret badge
- 1 Original Folgore Parachute Brigade sleeve insignia, bullion: note, such insignia are known as 'scudetti' (shields)
- 2 Original Folgore Parachute Brigade sleeve insignia, cloth or plastic
- 3 Current Folgore Brigade sleeve insignia, bullion
- 4 Current Folgore Brigade sleeve insignia, cloth or plastic

- 5 Early post-Second World War Folgore Combat Group sleeve insignia, bullion
- 6 Early post-Second World War Folgore Combat Group sleeve insignia, cloth or plastic
- 7 Bullion insignia for the support company at the Military Parachute school
- 8 Rubberized plastic version of No. 7
- 9 Military Parachute School sleeve insignia, bullion
- 10 Military Parachute School sleeve insignia, cloth or plastic
- 11 Parachute Instructor's patch: note that the word at the top of the patch is not 'SNIPER' but 'SMIPAR' standing for School, Military, Parachute
- 12 Folgore Brigade sport parachute patch
- 13 5th Company, 2nd Parachute Battalion sport patch
- 14 Silk patch for the Parachute Recondo Company



◀ *These are members of the Italian Special Forces, the Nucleo Operativo Centrale di Sicurezza (NOCS), whose standard equipment includes the Beretta Model 12 submachine-gun and the Beretta Model 92 SB pistol, both visible here.*



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## PLATE 60: ITALIAN CLOTH PARACHUTE INSIGNIA AND TURKISH INSIGNIA

- 15 Silk insignia for the 2nd Battalion of the Folgore Brigade. Colours designate companies: green, 4th Company
- 16 Blue, 5th Company
- 17 Maroon, 6th Company
- 18 Black, alternate pattern of 4th Company
- 19 Red, alternate pattern of 6th Company
- 20 Yellow, heavy weapons company
- 21 Patch for Target Acquisitions Unit of the Folgore Brigade

- 22 Pocket patch for the 14th Company of the 5th Parachute Battalion
- 23 Pocket patch for the HQ Company of the 5th Parachute Battalion
- 24 Pocket patch for the 15th Parachute Company
- 25 Shoulder Patch of the Commando and Service Company of the Parachute School
- 26 Unidentified.
- 27 Shoulder patch for the Aerial Supply Company of the Parachute School

### TURKEY

Turkish troops are legendary for their toughness which has given that country's special operations forces a good manpower pool to select from. Currently Turkey has one airborne brigade, one Commando brigade, and one marine brigade. Due to mountainous terrain in much of Turkey the Commando Brigade has received extensive training in mountain warfare. Additionally, the Turkish Air Force has trained parachute troops as have the Jandara, the national police. The counter-

terrorist unit of the latter, particularly, have received parachute, mountain, and Commando training.

Because of the closeness of the Soviet Union to their borders, the Turks have also emphasized the training of their special operations troops to form local guerrilla groups within Turkey. During the fighting in Cyprus in 1974, the Turkish Airborne Brigade was committed against Greek Cypriots in support of Turks on the island. Some jumped in and some were inserted via helicopter.

### PLATE 60 CONTINUED: TURKEY

- 1 Parachute rigger badge
- 2 Unidentified Turkish parachute unit (c. 1960s)
- 3 Command shoulder sleeve insignia
- 4 Para Commando shoulder sleeve insignia
- 5 Commando qualification badge
- 6 Commando and Mountain Warfare School badge
- 7 Gendarmerie Commando School badge
- 8 12th Aerial Delivery Company
- 9 Commando qualification badge
- 10 Cloth version of No. 6
- 11 Variation of No. 10
- 12 Gendarmerie breast qualification badge
- 13 Free-fall parachute patch

► Turkish paratrooper wearing the 'air landing' insignia on his left breast. (Adrian Bohlen)





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## SPAIN

Although they were air-lifted rather than dropped by parachute, Spanish Foreign Legion troops under Franco, brought from North Africa by aircraft, played a critical role in the Spanish Civil War. Soviet-trained Commando units such as that immortalized by Hemingway in *For Whom The Bell Tolls* operated on the other side during the Spanish Civil War. Some of these Soviet-trained troops as well as some Nationalists trained by the Germans received parachute training during 1938. Post-Second World War a few members of the Spanish Air Force received parachute training in Argentina and formed the nucleus for a Spanish parachute school at Alcantarilla Air Base. Within the Air Force a battalion of parachute troops was trained and operational by 1949.

It was not until five years later that the Army trained its own parachutists, the 1st Parachute Battalion, in February 1954. In 1956 the 2nd Battalion was formed, and in 1960 the 3rd Battalion was formed. The Army now formed its own parachute depot and training school at Murcia in 1961. 1958 had seen the first combat jump by Spanish paratroopers in Morocco in conjunction with French paras. In February, 1965, a Parachute Brigade was formed incorporating the three battalions as well as an artillery battalion, engineer battalion, mixed support battalion, and training bat-

talion; all parachute-qualified. Within the brigade are specialist HALO companies to act as pathfinders or for other special missions. The members of the Parachute Brigade wear a distinctive black beret.

There are also the COE (Companias de Operaciones Especiales) or special forces companies. Highly trained in small unit operations, survival, guerrilla, and counter-guerrilla operations, the COEs would have the mission of forming guerrilla movements within Spain should the country be invaded. They wear green berets.

The Spanish Air Force maintains three parachute companies who wear distinctive blue berets. Spanish combat swimmers receive parachute training as well.

The Spanish Foreign Legion is not as well known as the French Foreign Legion, but it is considered an élite light infantry formation within the Spanish Armed Forces. Though formerly 10–15 per cent of its strength was foreign, all recruits are now Spanish citizens. The Legion also maintains its own Special Operations Unit based at Ronda which adds scuba, parachuting, hand-to-hand combat, guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare to the Legion's excellent small unit training. Members of the Spanish Foreign Legion also wear green berets.

### PLATE 61: SPAIN

- 1 Airborne beret badge
- 2 Unidentified
- 3 Special operations beret badge
- 4 Variant of No. 3
- 5 Cloth special operations beret badge
- 6 Shoulder sleeve insignia of the Airborne Brigade
- 7 Subdued version of No. 6
- 8 Airborne artillery SSI
- 9 1st Airborne Battalion SSI
- 10 Airborne command and control SSI
- 11 3rd Airborne Battalion SSI
- 12 Engineers
- 13 2nd Airborne Battalion
- 14 Airborne logistics group SSI
- 15 Unidentified
- 16 Special operations companies SSI
- 17 Special operations qualification badge
- 18 Variant of special operations qualification badge
- 19 Variant of special operations qualification badge
- 20 Officers' airborne collar insignia
- 21 Other ranks' airborne collar insignia
- 22 Three years' airborne service badge in metal
- 23 Three years' airborne service badge in cloth
- 24 Variant of metal three years' airborne service
- 25 Four years' airborne service badge; note, the eagle clutching the parachute is the basic award while each stripe indicates an additional year of airborne service
- 26 Five years' airborne service
- 27 Six years' airborne service

PLATE 61



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## PLATE 62: SPAIN

- 28 Pocket crest worn on a fob for the HQ unit of the Parachute Brigade
- 29 Pocket crest for the Para Brigade training battalion; also worn by instructors
- 30 Para Brigade mixed support battalion pocket crest
- 31 Para Brigade engineer group pocket crest
- 32 Para Brigade artillery group pocket crest
- 33 Unidentified
- 34 Para Brigade pocket crest
- 35 1st Para Battalion pocket crest
- 36 2nd Para Battalion pocket crest
- 37 3rd Para Battalion pocket crest

## PORTUGAL

Portugal has had airborne troops since 1955 as part of the Air Force. During the colonial wars in Africa, the parachute troops were organized into a parachute regiment and four separate battalions. The separate battalions were for service in the colonies – one in Guinea, one in Angola, and two in Mozambique. Portuguese parachutists go through jump training at Tencos which is also the home of the Parachute Regiment. This training takes 31 weeks, the first fourteen basic and advanced infantry training, then four weeks of actual jump training which includes eight jumps, then finally thirteen weeks of advanced infantry and tactical training. Since 1961 female para-nurses have attended a 3-month course at the same school. During the counter-insurgency wars in Africa it was standard for recent graduates of the airborne school to serve two years overseas with one of the combat units then return to the parent regiment.

Portugal has also had many separate Commando units, once again primarily for service in the colonies. A Special Operations School at Lamego taught a 10-week course particularly for officers and NCOs being sent to Africa. Overseas Commando schools were also maintained for training indigenous black Commando troops in the colonies. These local schools were also used to give Portuguese Commandos an additional four weeks of acclimatization training.

- 38 Special Operations shoulder arc
- 39 Naval special operations subdued patch
- 40 62nd Special Operations Company subdued patch
- 41 92nd Special Operations Company subdued patch
- 42 101st Special Operations Company subdued patch
- 43 103rd Special Operations Company coloured patch
- 44 Sleeve insignia of the Unidad Especial de Intervencion, the hostage rescue unit of the Guardia Civil
- 45 Special Operations Company of the Spanish Foreign Legion patch
- 46 Pocket crest of the Grupo Especial de Operaciones, the hostage rescue unit of the Policia Nacional

Another unit of special interest designed for service in the colonies was the CACADORES, elite light infantry units roughly equivalent to the US Rangers. Their specialties were raids, ambushes, and counter-insurgency.

Finally, within the Portuguese Marines there are special Commando-trained detachments as well as a small number of combat swimmers.

Airborne troops wear the green beret; Commandos wear the red beret.

## PLATE 62: CONTINUED: PORTUGAL

- 1 Current pocket crest for the Airborne School
- 2 Pocket crest for CMI parachutists
- 3 1st Cie, Cacadores Para, 21st Battalion
- 4 Pocket crest of Operational Base No. 1, Lisbon
- 5 Corps de Policia parachutists
- 6 Unidentified
- 7 111 Cacadores parachutists
- 8 Airborne HQ
- 9 Commandos metal shoulder arc
- 10 Special operations metal shoulder arc
- 11 Commandos' breast pin

PLATE 62



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## PLATE 63: SWITZERLAND

Switzerland maintains only one small but élite airborne formation, the 17th Parachute Grenadier Company of the Swiss Air Force. It was first decided that Switzerland needed an airborne raiding and recon element in 1968, but the first school for military parachutists was not run until 1970. Over the next four years a school was run each year to bring the unit to strength, then from 1974 until 1982 schools were run every two years. Beginning in 1982 schools have again been run every year. In 1980 the para grenadiers were assigned their current long-range patrol/sabotage mission. An important note, by the way, is that the 17th Parachute Grenadier Company is the only Swiss unit with the mission of operating across Swiss borders in time of conflict.

Those interested in joining the 17th Company go through a rigorous selection process. At the age of 17, interviews and aptitude tests are given; those selected then undergo a 2-week basic parachute course including ten static line jumps. Most operational jumps in Switzerland would be free-fall, however, so at the age of 18 candidates undergo additional free-fall training during which they make forty jumps. Successful completion of this phase qualifies them for five months of additional training including a 5-week advanced military tactical parachute course during which they make at least 80 more jumps including day and night, full equipment, and low-level jumps. So intensive is the

training that out of 300 or more candidates only 12–15 will normally make it all the way through. Additional Commando/LRRP training is ongoing.

Normally the only distinctive insignia worn on the combat uniform by the Grenadier Paras is a shoulder slide bearing the numeral '17', but their fibre jump helmet also helps identify them. Additional insignia may be worn on dress uniforms or on sports clothing.

- 1 Para Grenadier collar insignia
- 2 Opposite collar of 613
- 3 17th Para Grenadier Company shoulder slide
- 4 Infantry grenadier (non-airborne but considered élite within the Swiss Army) collar insignia
- 5 Infantry grenadier sleeve insignia
- 6 Assault engineers (élite assault troops) sleeve insignia
- 7 17th Para Grenadier Company patch
- 8 Combat swimmer qualification
- 9 Combat swimmer/small boat collar insignia
- 10 1971 para selection course sport patch (awarded along with their wings to those successfully completing the course)
- 11 1972 para selection course sport patch
- 12 1973 selection course patch
- 13 1974 selection course patch
- 14 1976 selection course patch
- 15 1978 selection course patch
- 16 1980 selection course patch
- 17 1982 selection course patch
- 18 Grenadier para patch



◀A member of Switzerland's 17th Grenadier Parachute Company shows the shoulder slide worn on the combat dress. (Adrian Bohlen)



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## PLATE 64: CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Prior to the 1968 Soviet invasion, the Czechs deployed an airborne brigade – the *Vysadkova Brigada*, but during the post-invasion period, airborne strength was cut back to regimental strength, stationed near Prosnice. The regiment appears to have four battalions: one active parachute, one active special operations, one reserve, and one training.

Czech parachute training includes a basic five jumps during a one-month airborne school for the award of the 3rd Class parachute brevet. Ten jumps, including day and night jumps and equipment jumps, are required for the 2nd Class brevet. The 1st Class brevet is awarded after 25 jumps. To receive the Instructor's brevet, it is necessary to make 50 jumps including tree jumps, water jumps, and free-fall jumps, the latter including target accuracy of the descent. To receive the highest award of Master Parachutist requires 250 jumps which include at least twenty water jumps, five tree jumps, twenty night jumps, five jumps wearing gas mask, five jumps carrying a radio, and five jumps

carrying a crew-served weapon. Only officers and NCOs are eligible for award of the Instructor and Master brevets. Members of the Czech Air Force also receive training which also includes maintenance of the chutes carried in the seat pack on jets and, for the more advanced ratings, ejection-seat jumps.

Czech airborne troops wear an interesting maroon beret for dress uniform, but the same beret can be turned inside out whereupon it becomes a camo beret for field wear.

- 1 Airborne sleeve insignia 1948–59 in silk
- 2 Same as No. 1 in cloth
- 3 Diamond-shaped sleeve insignia worn by airborne troops from 1962 to the present. This one is for the Diversion Group
- 4 Tactical Recon troops
- 5 Special Anti-tank Group
- 6 Special Strategic Recon
- 7 Airborne Brigade
- 8 Airborne School

## PLATE 64 CONTINUED: SOVIET UNION

The Soviet Union was the first country to experiment with airborne troops, and this interest has continued to the present as the Soviet Union fields seven airborne divisions, though as this is written it appears some will be disbanded. Each airborne division has three airborne regiments as well as support arms. The divisions are rather small (about 6,500 troops) and are heavily mechanized with 320 BMD armoured fighting vehicles. The airborne forces saw heavy combat in Afghanistan as élite light infantry and as air assault troops. Soviet paratroopers also took part in the invasion of Czechoslovakia and were poised for commitment in the Middle East during the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Another élite within the Soviet armed forces is the Naval Infantry, the equivalent of the USMC or the Royal Marines. There are four naval infantry regiments, two assigned to the Black Sea Fleet, one to the Baltic Fleet, and one to the Northern Fleet. Each of these regiments is broken down into three amphibious motor rifle battalions with BTR-60 amphibious

armoured troop carriers, and one naval tank battalion with PT-76 amphibious tanks and T-55 or T-72 tanks. Many members of the Naval Infantry are also airborne/air assault-qualified.

Soviet special forces are known as Spetsnaz and fall within the GRU (military intelligence). There are Army spetsnaz who would function in raiding missions of the SAS or US Ranger type, and naval Spetsnaz who would function much as the US SEALs or Marine RECONs or the British SBS. They are specifically targeted at NATO nuclear installations and with the assassination of high-ranking political and military personnel. There are also specialized personnel within the KGB known as Osnaz with similar missions.

Soviet élite forces wear berets as follows: airborne troops a light blue, naval infantry black. Spetsnaz often wear these same berets.

- 1 Airborne troops arm badge
- 2 Airborne troops shoulder board
- 3 Naval Infantry arm badge



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▲ Soviet paratroopers wear the airborne beret, parachutists badge, airborne shoulder insignia and the distinctive striped T-shirt.

◀ Soviet airlanding troops wearing camouflage and service caps move out from a Hind helicopter.





▲Spanish airborne NCO offers a good view of various parachute insignia

including airborne collar insignia. (Adrian Bohlen)



▲Spanish paratrooper; note the beret badge and

shoulder sleeve insignia. (Adrian Bohlen)





▲Brazilian wearing what appears to be the yellow bordered black backing to

his parachute wings which indicates service in the Special Forces.



▲Brazilian Air Force NCO, probably with the

parachute rescue unit. (Adrian Bohlen)



▲ Danish Jäger sports not only Danish parachute brevet but US and French

brevets as well. (Adrian Bohlen)



▲ Turkish air force paratrooper; note qualification badges on the left breast including

mountain/ski and Commando. (Adrian Bohlen)





◀ Thai paratrooper wearing maroon beret and both parachute brevet and Ranger qualification badge. (Adrian Bohlen)

# BADGES AND INSIGNIA OF THE



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